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With the 27th Battery in France : 7th Au

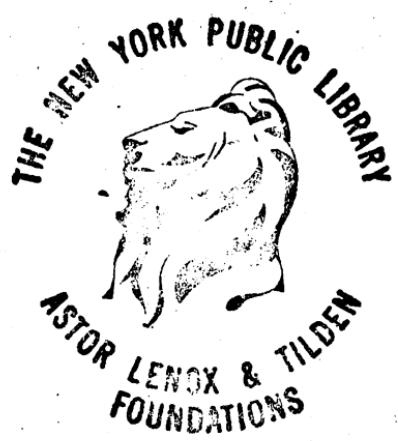
AUSTRALIAN  
BATTERY  
IN  
FRANCE

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By  
*A Bombardier.*

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**WITH THE  
27th BATTERY  
IN  
FRANCE.**

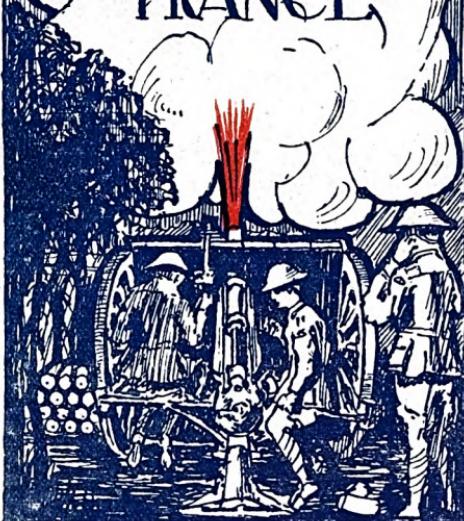
**A**

To the  
memory of the men  
who lost their lives  
while serving  
with the  
27th  
Battery.





WITH  
THE  
**27<sup>TH</sup>. BATTERY.**  
IN  
FRANCE.





## **FOREWORD.**

The publication of this volume, which endeavours to present an unofficial history of the 27th 18-pdr. Battery of the 7th Field Artillery Brigade, 3rd Australian Division, in France during 1917 and 1918, is due to the private enterprise of a committee of about twenty members of this battery.

Although the chronicling of the doings of the battery was primarily taken in hand consequent upon a Brigade order, it was for many months kept up to date more from a wish to provide a fitting souvenir for all those interested in their old battery than from the original reason for it being commenced.

While all facts in connection with the battery's doings are authentic—references made to military operations outside the battery's sphere are correct as far as could be ascertained, but are not vouched for—the greater part of the book being written on the spot while with the battery in action, reference was often impossible to official documents or even newspapers.

It might be added that the writer of these pages was for the greater part of the time the battery's observer, and, therefore, had opportunities of seeing from observation posts incidents denied to the "man behind the gun." The men of the battery, when in action, seldom knew the reasons for their firing or the results they obtained.

If the reading of these pages, in years to come, revives memories in the minds of the men of the "27th" of some of the bad times—and the good times (which might be harder to remember!)—then its aim may be deemed to have been accomplished and its appearance in print excused.

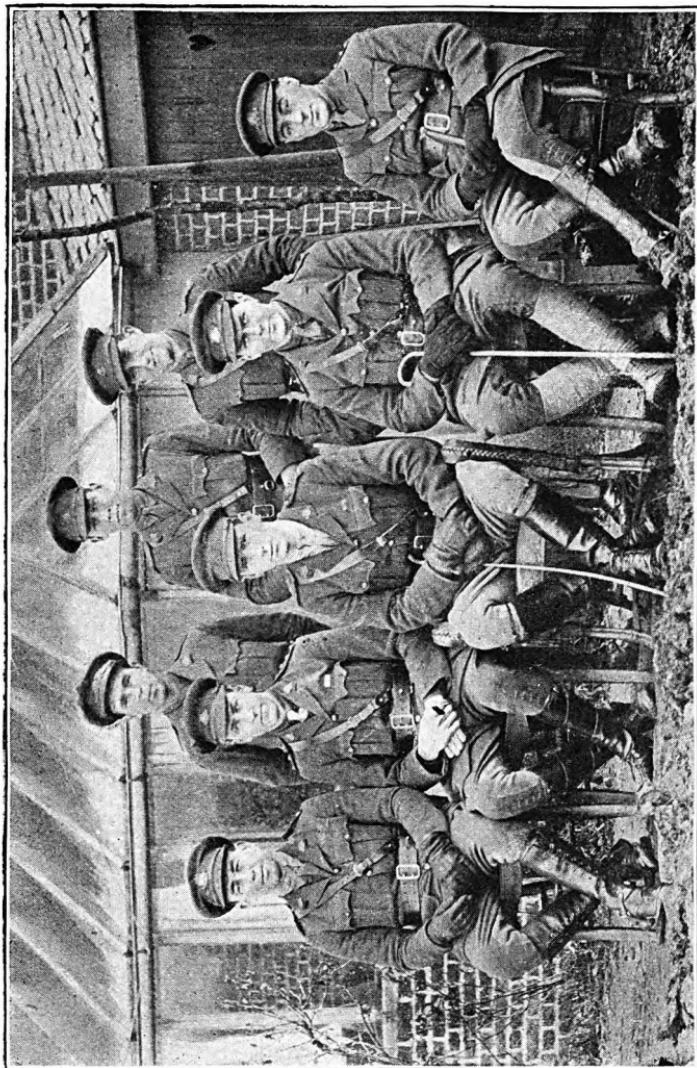
T. D. BRIDGER,  
Bombdr. 27th Bty.

February, 1919.



*January, 1918.*

OFFICERS OF THE 27th BATTERY.





## STRAZAELE.

On December 31, 1916, the two four-gun batteries of the old 23rd Howitzer Brigade—the 28th and 36th—entrained at Amesbury for Southampton, where they arrived about midday. They embarked at 7 p.m. on the s.s. "Archimedes," which arrived at Le Havre in the early hours of the following day, and disembarkation was commenced at 5 p.m. the same evening.

Thence, after one day in the rest camp of that city, they once again entrained—guns, wagons, horses, and the usual stores of all descriptions—and after a long and tedious journey of about twenty-four hours arrived at Bailleul at 11 p.m. on January 3, 1917.

At 6 a.m. the following morning, after the march to Strazaele, their destination, and after horse lines had been fixed up, all hands were particularly pleased the journey was over and they could retire to their billets—even if they were only more or less recently occupied pig-sties!

The march from the station had, of course, been carried out under cover of darkness, and there were not a few who expected anything sudden and horrible to happen owing to the seeming proximity of the Verey Lights in the trenches—the nearest of which, in reality, would be a matter of at least ten kilometres distant.

The first casualty occurred during this march—Gunner Tozer had the misfortune to get jolted off one of the wagons, with the result that his leg was broken, and his career with the battery was at an end.

It was at the third billet at Strazaele, the proprietress of which was known among the local society—for the most part amateur estaminet keepers—as "Madame Plenty Stink" (and she lived up to her name with her whole heart), that the old 36th Battery of the 23rd Brigade and the Right Section of the 28th Battery of the same Brigade were joined together, forming the 27th Battery of the 7th Brigade, and making it a six-gun battery. The officers at this time were:—

Captain W. A. R. Peart,  
Lieut. A. McAdam,  
Lieut. G. B. Owen,  
Lieut. E. M. Neylan,  
Lieut. B. Venn Brown, and  
Lieut. J. J. Graham.

The old 36th formed the Right and Centre Sections, whilst the Section from the 28th Battery formed the Left.

It was at Strazaele that the men of the battery learned what active service conditions really meant, and the name "Strazaele"

is likely to be indelibly written on the memories of all those who were unfortunate enough to be there. Weather conditions at that time were dead against the "open-air treatment," as all meals had to be partaken practically in the open, and it must be remembered that the winter of this particular year was the coldest experienced in this part of the globe for the previous twenty to twenty-five years, making the conditions under which the men worked much harder to bear.

Night after night gunners and drivers would be dismissed about 5 p.m. until the following morning, wet through up to their waists through working all day in the mud and slime—more than knee deep in many places—of what was once a paddock, caused through the continual traffic of the battery's horses going to and fro to water, and for exercising.

As Captain Bairnsfather has written, all Belgian farms are built on the same principle—the buildings being arranged on the three sides of a square, "with a quadrangular smell in the middle." Repairs were scarcely known to the roofs or walls, and to the novice in the art of warfare who had not yet acquired the power of comparison in billets, they were anything but good. It was also the depth of the wet and wintry weather.

The evening recreation was a simple one, and the troops who *had* any money adjourned to the nearest "egg-and-chip joint," and, if there was room, endeavoured to dry a spare pair of socks and, perhaps, some other garments, while waiting for the only item on the bill of fare—eggs and chips! At eight o'clock punctually these houses of refuge would close, and the hungry clients would be dismissed with the now-familiar phrase: "Eight o'clock fineesh," and then there was nothing for it but a bitterly cold walk "home" through the perpetual drizzling rain, or perhaps icy snow.

One of the many duties for a driver is horse picquet. At certain feed hours it is the job of the picquet to place the feed bags on some 160 horses. On specially dark nights, and when the bags are well coated with wet and icy mud, the horse, with a deft swing of the head, had a remarkable habit of landing the bag somewhere about the head of his unfortunate Samaritan, and rendering him perhaps a little more muddy than he was before.

There were several changes of billets during the fortnight spent at Strazaele. Notice to quit was short, and packing and saddling up were sometimes carried out under most trying conditions, nearly everyone carrying too much personal kit, which later experience has shown to be a fallacy. An important inspection was held by General Godley, and great preparations were made by the battery under the prevailing conditions to clean up horses and harness, and give an impression that they were not really what they looked at the moment. One team was in a hopeless state; in spite of all the work put into it in the great endeavour they seemed to have failed. When they were approaching the saluting point an officer in attendance on the General, addressing the subaltern in whose section the team happened to be, said:

"Your team got in a ditch, did it not, Mr. So-and-so?"—(this evidently said to gloss over their sorry appearance)—to which the officer replied: "No, sir!"

In all, during the fifteen days spent at Strazaele four billets were occupied at different times. They were all within fairly easy reach of each other, but the process of preparation for departure was the same, however short the distance to be covered. It was a common occurrence for outriders—those men who rode single mounts, such as the battery staff—and for those who had no other means of carrying their kit except hung round their bodies and strapped on their saddles, to be so weighted down that mounting at the word of command was a sheer impossibility. In addition to the regulation 50 rounds of .303 rifle ammunition in the bândolier, a full haversack, water bottle, two gas masks and steel helmet, these unfortunates had to carry a telephone and reel of cable, or a director, or some kind of signalling gear as well. The range-taker, fully equipped with his costly and, under trench war conditions, practically useless instrument, the rangefinder, was a sight for the gods resembling, as he did the old-time Christmas tree.

For drivers to collect their kit, drag it down the lines to the rear of their horses, find their saddle, pinch somebody's saddle blanket—because that had been done to them already and their own was "napoo"—saddle up, and deck themselves out in their gear—all against time—was a perspiring trial to the almost uninitiated. In mounting, if the saddle did not slip round under the horse, then the "tin hat," which was fastened under the left shoulder strap, would most certainly jump up and bark about two inches of skin off the limp and perspiring rider's face. It was when safely in the saddle, and only then, that a sigh of satisfaction might be indulged in.

An incident occurred once when the battery were preparing to move off. It happened that a recently promoted bombardier was in charge of the staff. They had fallen in "in line," and after the usual: "From the right tell off by fours" had been carried out, he gave the order, quite correctly: "Flanks of fours, prove!" This brought every fourth man's arm to the horizontal position in front of his body. There was a horrible pause, and after giving several individuals in the line very knowing looks, he roared out: "Sit easy!" To make matters worse, the O.C. had just ridden on to parade, and was watching the whole proceedings. The bombardier afterwards said: "For the life of me, I couldn't think how to get those chaps' arms down again!" "As you were!" was the correct formula, but at such times these simple terms seem hard to remember!

It was here that the first air fighting was seen, which naturally caused a good deal of interest. Orders were given not to look up, but in the light of later experiences, this was hardly a necessary precaution, as the planes concerned in the "box on" were many kilometres distant. However, one of the planes came down emitting clouds of smoke, but whether friend or foe could not be

discerned. It can only be hoped that in the subsequent official report "One of ours is missing" did not appear.

Bath parades were introduced here, and batches of men were marched off regularly the two miles to the baths. The victims were allowed three minutes to undress, after which time the tap would be turned on, and real water, just warm enough to give the lie to its being called cold, would fall out of carefully prepared small holes in the pipes, running the length of the shed. At the end of three minutes the tap would be turned off, and woe to the men who had not soaped themselves and washed it off in the allotted time—they were doomed to a sticky finish, unless luck favoured them and they could crowd in with the next batch of twenty—exactly three minutes later.

On the 9th January, 1917, the advance party left Strazaele in a motor transport. It consisted of the Numbers One, gunners from each sub-section, and a few telephonists and linesmen on the battery staff. After a few hours the party arrived at Armentières, and from there walked the remainder of the distance to the first battery position in Nouvel Houplines.

After a few days getting into the run of things there, some of the party returned to the wagon lines at Strazaele, and became the lions of the day with harrowing details of scenes in the firing line on the Western Front.

On January 18, 1917, nine days after the advance party, the battery moved off to take up their position in the line, the route taken being via Bailleul, Nieppe, Pont de Nieppe, and Armentières, and thence to their position at Nouvel Houplines.

Here they took over from "A" Battery of the 175th Brigade of the Royal Field Artillery, and after getting the guns into the pits, the limbers and wagons returned through Armentières and Pont de Nieppe to Jésus Farm, where the wagon lines were situated.

## HOUPLINES.

*From January 18, 1917, to February 29, 1917.*

This position was an ideal one in so far as the gun pits were covered from aerial observation, five guns being actually in roofed houses, the remaining gun ("D" Sub-section's) being in a camouflaged cupola pit, with numerous buildings and suburban streets in front of them. From the point of view of billets for the men, there was practically any number of vacant houses to choose from, and the gunners were easily able to make themselves fairly comfortable in them.

In view of later positions the battery has occupied in action, the old Houplines "possy" has always been looked upon as a "home," as each subsequent position has been more open, and the "home comforts" have become less—finally disappearing altogether. It was quite obvious that this position was to be the last training ground, only, under real active service conditions.

The Right Section here was detached, and was in a position about four hundred or five hundred yards to the right of the battery. A sub.'s gun pit was in what had once been a concert hall belonging to the church which stood at the top of the street. B sub.'s gun was a few houses further down, and the two pits were connected with a speaking tube for the simultaneous passing of orders. C sub.'s gun was at the end of what used to be the boiler house of the cotton mill, D sub. had a camouflaged pit outside, while E and F sub.'s were similarly situated in outbuildings connected with the same factory.

All the pits were built of corrugated cupolas and sand bags, and would stop stray splinters—if nothing more.

The sector of the front which was covered by the battery was held by the Third Divisional Infantry, and roughly extended from Pérenchies Church, on the northern side, southwards to Lomme Church spire, the zero point being a very much battered "halt," or wayside station, on the Armentières-Lille railway line. It was level, open country for the most part, with high ground and a formidable ridge in the background, with houses, not seriously damaged, on the slopes, and the small town of Pérenchies at the summit. On a clear day the chimneys of factories and the dome of the citadel in Lille would just be visible.

The O.P. for the battery, while in this position, was situated at the top of a disused factory chimney some 160 feet high, and in the early days of the occupation of this position the only means of reaching the slit at the top, through which observations were made, was by climbing up inside. Later on, the Engineers fixed

up a one-man lift, worked by a windlass from the bottom, which was a great improvement.

From the wagon lines at Jésus Farm to the position was a distance of about five miles, and taking up ammunition by night was usually a cold and long-drawn-out proceeding. The spare gunners at the wagon lines had by far the rougher time in this position, as the gunners at the battery were in comparatively well furnished rooms, and if a necessary article of furniture happened to be missing, it was an easy matter to find it either across the road or round the corner. Should the original owners of the property ever return and find their houses still standing some rather awkward situations are likely to occur; when Madame finds that Monsieur So-and-so opposite has nearly all her furniture in his house—including the kitchen range, and the double bed from the best bedroom upstairs!

On January 23, 1917, the battery had the distinction—if not the honour—of being the first battery of the division to be shelled. Snow had fallen, and the road leading to the battery may possibly have given away wheel tracks to an observant enemy. It was a bright, sunny day, and the first shell lobbed about ten o'clock in the morning, and they kept steadily screaming over until about three o'clock in the afternoon. The left and centre sections were evidently the target, and F sub's gun was put out of action with almost a direct hit. Holes were punched through the shield, while Gunner Geo. Drennan was sitting on number two's seat, but he was untouched. Some 140 rounds of 5.9's, in all, fell on the position, and no damage whatever was done until the last five rounds that day, which caused three casualties. At the time, the men were in the mess-room having dinner, when one of the shells came through the roof. Gunners G. G. Cameron and J. A. Mitchell were struck, the former being so seriously injured that he died almost immediately, but the latter was more fortunate, and after treatment in England, returned to the battery about six months later. When the same shell burst, Driver Hitchcock had a wonderful escape, as a fair-sized splinter struck him in the back, went through his tunic over his left shoulder, and was picked out next to his skin, over his right shoulder. At this time Driver Hitchcock was acting as Mr. J. J. Graham's groom, and on hearing that he had been hit, Mr. Graham ran out to see how he was, but before reaching him he was himself hit in the head with a small splinter. It did not prove to be very serious, however, and Mr. Graham was back with the battery a few weeks later.

Captain Peart's chestnut mare, which was stabled in rear of the battery, had a very narrow escape, a shell tearing it's way through underneath the door of the stable, and bursting within inches of the mare's hind legs—without doing any more damage than inflicting a scratch.

Owing to the right section being detached, they were entirely free from the shelling as their position had not been found out.

The shelling continued, intermittently, for about a month, and on February 18 the battery had its first experience of shell gas.

Bomb. M. Z. Martin,	Gunner E. A. Kilby,
Driver H. W. Hitchcock,	Gunner F. L. Stewart, and
Gunner M. Linnane,	Gunner J. C. Woolford,
Gunner F. Clarke,	

were all treated at hospital, and with the exception of Gunner Clarke, who was so badly gassed that he was returned to Australia, they went back to duty shortly afterwards.

On February 19 the battery made a barrage shoot, covering a preliminary raid at night carried out by the 43rd Battalion, which was a success.

A big raid was also carried out on the night of February 26 by the 10th Infantry Brigade, which was very successful, the infantry penetrating to the enemy's third line of trenches. For this raid the right section was detached to a forward position and to the right flank, especially for enfilade fire on the enemy's trenches in the neighbourhood of Pont Ballot. The left section of the 7th New Zealand Battery was attached to the 27th Battery for this raid, and occupied the pits vacated by the right section, Lieut. Gillespie being in charge of the section.

The forward position—known as "X7"—was immediately behind the subsidiary trenches and some distance in front of Square Farm. It was an open position, and had to be taken up under cover of darkness. A start was made a couple of nights previous to the raid to take the guns over, but owing to Fritz's searchlights, of which he had two in or behind his trenches, the idea had to be given up for that night, and the teams had to return to the wagon lines. At this stage of the battery's experience in France, which was only about four weeks, it was looked upon by quite a number as a horribly dangerous posse, and when rumours got to work, most of the troops resigned themselves to the inevitable, and gave up all hope of ever seeing home again. Even the battery's Amateur Army Medical Corps' man—he was a gunner, who had attended lectures on first aid at Larkhill, and was very keen on his work—increased the velocity of the "wind" by telling how he had drawn the morphia for administering to those who would be so seriously hurt that there was no hope for their recovery! Machine-gun bullets certainly whistled round the position occasionally, but there was no foundation for quite such a pessimistic outlook.

Captain Peart ranged the two guns on the afternoon of the stunt from the front-line trenches, and everything was most successful.

An incident occurred at 9.40 p.m. on the evening of the raid which might have had serious results. During the preliminary bombardment the camouflage covering the guns caught fire, and blazed furiously, lighting up the whole countryside. This

must have been easily visible to the enemy, but fortunately at that hour he was too busily occupied to direct fire on the position.

On February 29 the battery pulled out to take up its position at Chapelle Armentières. The new position was only a matter of a couple of kilometres from Houplines, which enabled return trips to be made for some of those necessities of life which do not appear in the official lists as Army Stores.

On the day before pulling out, the occupants of one billet found they had been blissfully sleeping, nightly, over a cellar charged with no less than sixty bottles of red wine. The bottles had been half-submerged in water, which accounted for their late discovery—but this fact, however, did not make them last the longer.

While at Houplines Mr. I. K. Harrison and Mr. A. H. Pitman joined the battery.

## CHAPELLE D'ARMENTIERES.

*From March 1, 1917, to March 14, 1917.*

Here the battery took over from "I" Battery of the Royal Horse Artillery, and the position was situated in some old brick-fields; the gun pits being arranged round the front of the kiln itself, and, although not being shell-proof, they were well concealed.

The Wez Macquart sector was covered by the battery in this position, and trenches on either side of this village were included, as far as La Hongrie Farm on the north, and Fort D'Englos on the south. Not a great deal was to be observed from the battery O.P. excepting occasional Huns taking short cuts in the open. The O.P. was at the Ferme du Biez, and was fairly close up, being at the top of the trench named "Cowgate Avenue," and just behind the support line.

It was while burying a telephone wire just at the back of this building, on March 4, that two signallers, D. E. Hodgens and C. Tuplin, were blown up by a 5.9-inch, which burst right between them while at work. An infantry officer, who was an eye-witness, remarked that it was the narrowest escape he had ever seen, as both the signallers got up and walked away. Tuplin without a scratch, but considerably dazed, and Hodgens—although not so fortunate—with twelve pieces of shell in different parts of his body, none of which, however, were in vital places. After several months in England he returned to the battery during the month of November, 1917. Tuplin was able to remain at duty, although the shock to his nerves must have been considerable.

Ammunition was brought up to the battery from the wagon lines to this position in the battery wagons, and one night, while unloading close to the kiln, Fritz put over a couple of rounds, one of which whistled over the top of the drivers' heads and buried itself—a dud—within feet of the lead horses of the team. The other round, fortunately, was fired with another fifty yards on the range, otherwise the results might have been serious.

Everything was quiet for the most part during the occupation of this position, with the exception of a few stray shells intended for harassing fire on the main road, which passed close to the position, and which was used by the infantry on their way to the trenches.

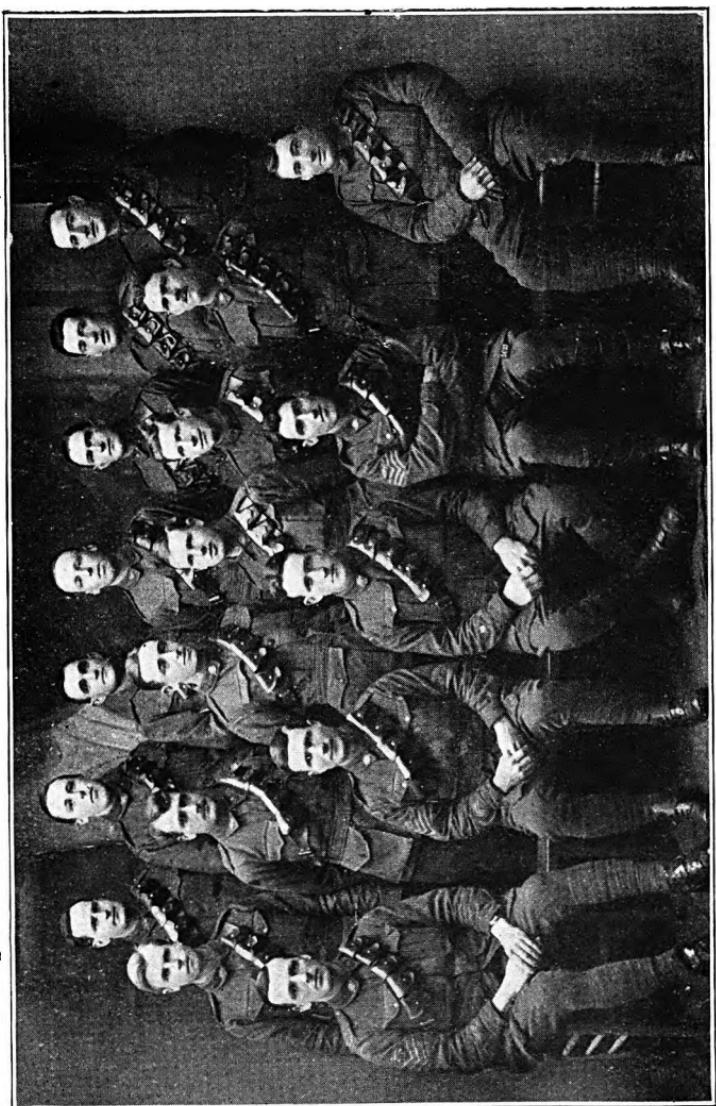
An unfortunate accident took place on March 11. Captain Peart was at the O.P. ranging, and No. 1 gun was in action. No. 2 had orders to "stand to," which necessitated the detachment using a duckboard track passing almost in front of No. 1 gun. Sergeant R. A. Newman and Gunner A. E. Talbot were

unlucky enough to be passing just at the moment when No. 1 fired, and from some unknown cause the shell-time shrapnel—exploded almost immediately after leaving the muzzle. Their injuries were so serious that they both died shortly after being admitted to hospital. The accident was the more unfortunate as prematures are rare occurrences, and in Sergeant Newman's case the more to be regretted seeing that he had only been up at the battery position less than a week.

The weather was frosty during the fortnight the battery were in this position, which accounted for a spark from a fire setting the beams in the roof alight. Fortunately, however, it was noticed in time. The troops were at once turned out to carry water, and pass it up to those extinguishing the fire. Bombardier Keats was unfortunate in catching one of the many buckets being thrown down to be refilled in his mouth, which dispensed with most of his teeth, and he is likely to remember his experience, when he "headed" the Fire Brigade, for many a day.

The big raid, which took place in this position on March 13, was carried out without any mishap. The barrage opened at 11.40 p.m., and the guns continued firing until 1 a.m., each gun firing approximately 180 rounds. During the firing Sergeant Waters had a narrow escape. He was standing behind B sub gun with an electric torch, and a watch in his hand, timing the firing, when a machine-gun, or sniper's bullet, struck his torch, evidently being attracted by the light.

Mr. Pitman left the battery here to go to the Trench-Mortars, and on March 14 the battery pulled out to wagon lines, which had been transferred from Jésus Farm to L'Hallabeau. On February 15, and on the following day the battery went into action at Ploegsteert.



"A" SUB-SECTION.  
*December, 1918.*



## PLOEGSTEERT.

*From March 15, 1917, to April 4, 1917.*

This position was situated some three kilometres on the northern side of Armentières, on the Le Bizet-Messines Road. The guns were in a row of houses, and pits had been built in the front rooms of some of them. The houses faced immediately on to the main road, and during firing any traffic along the road had to be stopped. There were no houses in front of the position, with the exception of a couple of old farmhouses, and, for the most part, the outlook was upon open paddocks with a few hedges and ditches, and some straggling rows of trees, to complete the cover from observation. All the men's billets were in rooms at the back of the houses, and close to the guns, and a great amount of comfort was derived from the fires which were available.

The sector, covered from this position, had for a zero point a very much battered house, some five hundred yards behind the enemy front-line trench, and to the south of Pont Rouge. It extended as far as "Hennessy's House," near Detlement, on the north, and the Laundry, near Frélinghien, on the south.

The battery O.P. was at Laurence Farm, from where good observation was possible, and there were several opportunities for "sniping" working parties and batches of enemy troops moving in rear of their trenches. One target named "Saygo" was registered, and a gun was usually kept laid on it, ready for strafing parties of the enemy as soon as they appeared. The target itself was an opening in a row of trees in the vicinity of Hennessy's House, and good results were obtained on several occasions. Hennessy's House was so named after its peace-time owner—of "Three-Star Brandy" fame—the shooting (also peace-time!) in Ploegsteert Wood being under his ownership.

While at this position, Captain H. B. Taylor took command of the battery. Sergeant-Major Croughan left the battery here, being replaced by Sergeant-Major Lowe.

Duty shoots, and particularly battery salvos, were directed by the Major from a vantage point on the roof of one of the houses, the orders being by megaphone.

At 2 a.m. on March 28 the battery had an S.O.S. call, which satisfactorily broke up a raid on the trenches by the enemy, only four of his infantrymen getting as far as the front-line trench.

About 7 o'clock on the evening of April 7, a terrible sight was witnessed. One of our patrolling planes—commonly spoken of as a "bus"—was attacked by three fast enemy scouts, who evidently lodged a bullet in a vital part of the machine, setting it on fire. A streak of thick, black smoke followed the plane on its downward course, and, with the aid of glasses, the faces of the

pilot and observer could be distinctly seen. The flames were also distinguishable licking over the sides of the body of the machine, but in spite of this, the plane was under perfect control until within some fifty feet of landing. It appeared that the heat was then beyond endurance, and although just within reach of safety, the machine toppled forward, crashed to earth, and burst into flames and clouds of smoke.

It was a plucky fight against odds, and is likely to be remembered by all who saw it as a most impressive sight. The 'plane fell immediately in rear of the battery position, and was the first near view the men had had of an aeroplane being destroyed. The 27th Battery that night had to supply a guard over the two charred bodies and the wrecked machine.

An additional O.P., used only for ranging on special targets, being a matter of only 200 to 300 yards behind our front-line trench, was a steel tree named "Molly." This tree was one of a row of tall poplars, and quite close to Warnave Lodge. It was difficult of access as it entailed a hop over the top of the trench, and a walk over exposed ground, without any reference to one or two muddy ditches half full of water, and proudly designated on maps as the "Warnave River."

The tree would not be even bullet-proof, as many holes in the steel trunk proved, but as long as the Hun did not guess its usefulness the user would be fairly safe.

Bath parades were a weekly feature in this position, and were usually looked forward to as the nearest approach to a day off. It entailed a long walk to Pont de Nieppe to a disused brewery, which had been turned into divisional baths, and hot water was laid on to several vats. The water in the vats was about four feet deep and each vat, when full up, would hold about ten men in an upright position. The washing process consisted of endeavouring to soap the submerged portion of the body, and chasing elusive pieces of soap, which always made for the bottom. However, a bath and a clean change are a luxury, even though they may entail a long walk, and a run over frosty duckboards in bare feet and a smile, before they are won.

A certain wild Irishman, when returning from one of these parades, alarmed his companions by drawing their attention to a tree that had been "knocked into three haffs" by an enemy shell. It is not on record whether he had inadvertently drunk his bath or what caused this hallucination!

An enemy battery, probably a 10.5 cm. howitzer—commonly called a 4.2-inch—did some good shooting on the road; out of six rounds registering four were within three feet of each other, in a line, down the centre of the stone sets. It was at this spot, a day or so later, that two infantry despatch riders on bicycles rode into a bursting shell, just to the right of the battery position. One was killed and the other rather badly wounded. The same day one bicycle was "marched in and taken on the battery strength."

A 4.5-inch Howitzer Battery—the 107th of the 7th Brigade—were shelled on April 8, and also on two or three occasions later, and their position was some three hundred yards to the right flank of the 27th Battery. Their gun pits were in a paddock about a hundred yards back from the roadway, and during the shelling, owing to some of the enemy shells falling short, exciting scenes were often witnessed on the roadway.

It is possible that the preliminary ranging on the position occupied by the twenty-seventh was completed about this time, as, on one or two occasions, stray shells fell on the line of the battery, both "short" and "over," including time shrapnel bursts. These were significant, seeing that the 31st Battery of the 8th Brigade, who took over the position less than a week later were shelled out, sustaining a few casualties.

The sergeants, while at Ploegsteert, were in charge of "Tommy" working parties engaged in building gun pits for occupation at a later date, and situated nearer to Hill 63, and, concerning which, a good deal of secrecy was observed.

Mr. T. Morrell, for several days, was engaged on work in preparation for the "push" which was to take place early in the following June. It comprised an examination of the enemy's wire entanglement defences in the vicinity of his trenches. The part of the line concerned was to the north of the Ploegsteert sector and included the ground between La Petite Douve Farm, in the valley below Messines, southwards to St. Yves at the western end of Ploegsteert Wood. As events showed later, this was the point at which the 3rd Division Infantry went over in the great attack on the morning of June 7. The majority of the mapping was done from an O.P. dugout (U.6.a) in Heath Trench, on Hill 63, but a closer view was obtainable from the front line, with the aid of a periscope, in the vicinity of St. Yves.

A great increase in activity was noticeable in the number of fresh batteries pulling into new positions. A railway line was being constructed at the rear of Ploegsteert, and many minor details pointed to the big things that were to take place within the next few weeks.

On April 13 and 14 the battery pulled out to wagon lines situated near Steenwerck, where preparations had been in progress for the route march to Selles, the start being made early on April 16.

## THE SPELL AT SELLES.

*From April 16, 1917, to May 3, 1917.*

The outward route was by way of Wallon Capel, some three kilometres from Hazebrouck, where open horse lines were fixed up for the night. The billets were in adjacent barns and farm-houses, but owing to the fall of snow and the cold weather, the conditions were not ideal. The Brigade moved out again early the following morning, in squally weather, and reached Longuenesse—the other side of Saint Omer—during the afternoon. When passing through Arques Sergeant Chappell's horse reared and fell on him, and he was a hospital patient for a few days, but the injury, luckily, did not prove serious. That part of the trip was through particularly open country, and a strong north wind, about midday, turned into a blizzard, which did not improve matters.

At ten o'clock on the morning of April 18, the battery left Longuenesse and reached Selles, via Lumbres, late in the afternoon. There was an improvement in the weather that day, which held for the rest of the trip, making it an enjoyable one for all ranks.

The village of Selles was only a very small one, consisting of a few struggling farmhouses and the inevitable country estaminets. Owing to the great improvement in the weather the horses put on condition rapidly, and the lines in the paddock were practically free from mud.

Leave was granted for the afternoons in the neighbouring town of Dèvres—a quiet little place about five kilometres from Selles.

Various forms of exercises were arranged to keep the troops from stagnating. Physical "jerks" were carried out every morning under Mr. Harrison, and there was a brigade signal school for "spooks," particularly for visual work. Inter-sectional football matches were also played on several afternoons. Brigade sports were held in a neighbouring paddock, in which the Twenty-seventh succeeded in gaining a fair share in the mounted and dismounted events. A special feature was made in the general turn-out and appearance of the guard and picquet, the cleanest and best-dressed man being dismissed from duty. In fact, the turn-out came to such a high state of perfection that the man who was dismissed on one occasion was the one who had cleaned, with polish, the brass eyelet holes in his high field boots!

The battery commenced the return trip on May 1, the halting place for the night being Longuenesse. The march was devoid of any special interest, and on the evening of May 2, after a

long day's march, the battery pulled into wagon lines on the outskirts of Hazebrouck. There were a number of sore men, and sore heels, after this day's march—it being the longest stretch the battery had accomplished in one day.

On the morning of May 3 the advance party, consisting of certain officers, numbers one of subsections, and some of the staff left by motor transport for the next position where the battery were to come into action, and situated at Nouvel Houplines. The remainder of the battery continued the march to wagon lines at Nieppe the same day, where they were situated while in this position.

## THE SECOND HOULINES.

*From May 3, 1917, to May 18, 1917.*

This position was quite close to the previous one, but a matter of some three hundred yards to the rear. The battery pulled in on May 4, and were attached to the 57th Division, for the time being, taking over from a New Zealand battery. The gun pits were arranged in buildings and houses connected with disused gas works. A and B subs. were detached to a position on the other side of the River Lys, forming the left section of the battery. C and D subs. were in pits where once had been the engine-house of the works. E and F subs. were the right section, and were about one hundred yards to the right front of the centre section, and their pits were in a terrace of small houses.

The sector covered by the battery in this position was to the north of that covered previously in the month of January. It extended, roughly, from Frélinghien on the north to Pérenchies on the south.

The same O.P. was in commission, but the visibility from the chimney was greatly improved. A fair amount of movement was to be seen behind the trenches, and one or two "Fritzes" could daily be seen, going and returning, with their dixies about meal times. In the back areas transport could occasionally be seen moving on the roads.

As in the previous case when the battery were at Houplines, the men were billeted in vacated houses, and the quarters were equally comfortable. The left section (A and B subs.), across the river, could only be reached by boat, and rations and men had to be ferried across when the necessity arose.

Mr. Neylan was in charge of the detached section, and presumably bearing in mind a little song he was often heard humming about "an optimist and pessimist" he chose to be the former, and arranged his sleeping quarters in the cemetery adjacent!

Two brainy individuals, when off duty one quiet afternoon, took the boat and went fishing, but instead of the usual tackle they experimented with some Mills' bombs. The idea was to withdraw the pin, drop the bomb over the side of the boat, and pick out the dead and dying as they floated to the surface. The result netted, actually, was four holes in the boat and the "wind up" until the nearest bank was reached.

A couple of days after taking over this position the battery —A and B subs. in particular—was heavily shelled with 5.9-inch H.E. and gas shells. The latter's pits and billets were in an old farmhouse, and just in rear of some disused gun pits, and the bulk of the enemy fire was directed on this old position. However, the fire was sufficiently severe for a temporary evacuation.

Gas respirators had to be worn, and there were some rather anxious hours for the men who had to stay on duty at the position, the telephonists in the control in particular, around which some of the gas shells were lobbing unpleasantly close. For some little time the buzzer had to be resorted to as speaking on the 'phone with respirators adjusted was, of course, impracticable.

Rumours of the doings of spies were again prevalent, and the enthusiasts were again out seeing things. At a neighbouring factory it was reported that signal lights had been seen in a window of one of the upper stories. Four men of the battery on seeing the light went to investigate on the spot, but without a great deal of success—apart from upsetting a French caretaker, who lived on the premises. Owing to the difficulty of making the reason for the visit understood, relations were hardly friendly, and the search had to be given up. The officers' mess were informed, and Mr. Morell and Mr. Owen made some further enquiries, but without elucidating the mystery.

At 7.30 p.m. on May 7 there was a heavy bombardment of the trenches by the enemy, to which the battery immediately replied, having some spare ammunition on hand. A few moments later, a request for "retaliation" came through from the infantry, quickly followed by an S.O.S. It appeared that an exceptionally big enemy raid was in progress, and shortly after the S.O.S. call Strombus horns could be heard sounding in the trenches, giving the warning for gas. Respirators were worn until about 10 p.m., when the "cease fire" came through, but no gas was put over, it evidently being a false alarm.

The wagon lines were within a short distance of Nieppe Station, and the horses of the right and centre sections were stabled on lines next to the level crossing, the left section, and staff horses being in a stable some little distance down the Steenwerk Road. It was here the wagon lines had the experience of enemy shells, for the first time. About midday on May 6, without any warning, a shell of heavy calibre screamed over the horse lines and landed—a dud—some distance beyond a house used by the officers as a mess. The second round was a minus, and burst on the same line as the previous shot. The two following and final rounds knocked a corner off the house, and put a hole, some twelve feet deep, and about fifteen feet in diameter, a few yards away. It seemed strange that so few rounds should have been fired, and, if the house that was actually hit was the intended target, why it should have been singled out by the enemy gunners. It may only have been a coincidence, but a week or so later the official in charge of one of the Church huts close by, and frequented by soldiers, was arrested for having in his possession certain rather suspicious documents. It was understood, at the time, that the man was convicted and shot, but whether he was the cause of the shelling is uncertain—the fact remains that four rounds were fired, and the house being used as the officers' mess was hit about the hour when they would be expected to be at lunch.

Some narrow escapes were experienced by men who happened to be passing the house at the time. One of these was Driver Hitchcock, who preferred the protection of the muddy ditch at the roadside, full of green water, to a dry skin with probably a few holes punched in it with flying splinters.

From the middle of May to the end of the month every available paddock in the vicinity was taken up with Field Artillery wagon lines. Mostly 18-pounders and 4.5-inch Howitzers—they came from all parts of the line. The Fourth Australian Division were there from Bullecourt, and R.F.A. batteries from Vimy Ridge, and other parts of the line down south.

On May 18 the battery pulled out from Houplines, and after spending one night at the wagon lines, they once again went into action in a partly prepared position, on the following day, in the neighbourhood of the cross roads at Ploegsteert, and familiarly spoken of as the "first K.3 possey," or "Sandbag Alley."

## PLOEGSTEERT.

(FIRST K 3 POSITION.)

*May 19 to June 14, 1917.*

This position was the first one occupied by the 27th Battery which would be termed an open position. The camouflage pits were arranged in line, and ran just in rear of one of the many ditches or drains, which had previously denoted the boundary of the farmer's property. In prolongation of the line of guns, at each end, was a track, worn brown by traffic, and, from photographs taken by aircraft, the camouflage covering, from any height, resembled in colour the track on either side of it, and it would give the impression that it was merely the continuation of the road. The position would therefore be fairly safe from detection by enemy aircraft. In front of the battery the cover was limited, there being only a hedge of low bushes some two hundred yards in front, and, further forward still, a few houses on the main road.

A great deal of work was necessary to improve the position, and this entailed the filling of some hundreds of sandbags, and, with the addition of timber and iron cupolas, it was made to a great extent splinter-proof.

The sector covered by the battery was still further to the north of the previous one when in action in the same vicinity, and extended from the Douve Farm on the north to Deflement on the south. The O.P. used was situated in Heath Trench, on the side of Hill 63, and also for ranging purposes—St. Yves.

All round great preparations for the day to come were still in progress. New batteries, from 18-pounders to those of the heaviest calibres, were pulling into position. Not a night passed but motor tractors with guns and howitzers in tow lined the roads, and caterpillar tractors strained at their loads with guns of heavier calibres.

Ammunition dumps sprang up at every turn of the road, and nearly every house contained something of an explosive nature. At the turning where the road to the battery left the main Romarin Road, and known by the name of "Windy Corner," an 8-inch howitzer battery was installed. On this corner was a small patch of timber, and Fritz, in his endeavour to find them, usually made the pace a hot one in the vicinity.

The 27th Battery were kept actively engaged with a harassing fire on the enemy's roads and communications, in putting down practice barrages, and covering infantry raids which were carried out in the main for obtaining information as to the enemy's doings and preparation of his defensive works.

On June 8 the camouflage covering the gun pits near A sub's pit was set on fire, as also was a dump of ammunition, evidently started by a shell lobbing on the dump. It was only through the prompt

action of Mr. Neylan, Bdr. Bradley and Gnr. Gemmell that the conflagration did not attain alarming proportions, with the prospect of the fire spreading to the dumps adjacent to the other gun pits. For this act Bdr. Bradley and Gnr. Gemmell were awarded the Military Medal, this being the first instance of a decoration being gained by men of the battery.

On the same day, an enemy battery scored a direct hit on Cinder Dump, about 200 yards to the left of the battery, and being mostly gas shells in the dump they exploded, and owing to the unfavourable wind which was blowing at the time in the direction of the battery box respirators had to be worn for about ten hours. This was a most trying ordeal, and the effects were felt for many days afterwards. In addition to the gas from the dump that night, gas shells in great numbers were used by the enemy batteries. Not knowing when the attack was to take place, it was obvious the enemy was in a nervous state. In consequence, almost nightly shelling took place with gas shells, resulting in the ground being literally saturated with the pungent odour. At times during the evening "strafes" shells would be coming over with such rapidity that it resembled a rainstorm, a very large number of batteries evidently being engaged on the one sector. Counter battery work by the heavies was energetically carried out, but the enemy fire on dumps and batteries in the vicinity was very severe.

It was a common occurrence for an enemy barrage to be opened on the roads in the neighbourhood of Ploegsteert, and casualties among teams on the roads were not uncommon. Large stocks of ammunition were being got together at the guns, and about 2,500 rounds would be buried handy to each pit, in addition to which there would be about this time, roughly, 400 rounds in the racks inside each pit. A great deal of this ammunition was carted by the divisional ammunition column from dumps further behind the line to the forward dumps, and a certain quantity to the batteries themselves. When such enormous quantities of ammunition were being fired daily, and allowing for accidents, such as dumps being found by enemy artillery, and other wastage, the work entailed in bringing up ammunition for one battery alone was enormous.

For the first time since arriving in France the drivers of the battery in this position were up among the shell fire, and did good work, mostly at night time, taking up ammunition from the dumps at railhead and from forward dumps in the vicinity of the batteries. From "Windy Corner" to the battery position was usually the worst patch of road to be navigated, and about 300 to 400 yards in length.

On June 4 Gunners I. C. Charlesworth and G. L. Drennan were treated in hospital as a result of the continued gas bombardment of the previous night, and two days later, owing to a gas shell bursting in No. 5 gun's dug-out during the night, Gunners J. Myers, J. C. A. Johnson, F. L. Stewart (for the second occasion), R. P. S. Dawson, C. G. Cowie, and on June 8 A. F. Kirby and Sergeant A. J. Frazer, and on June 12 Gunner J. G. E. Carew were admitted to hospital for the same reason. With the exception of Sergeant

Frazer they returned, however, within the next few weeks, and it is to be hoped without any lasting ill effects from the experience.

Up to this time, although duty shoots were carried out according to programme, the battery had not been shelled seriously. This was probably due to the fact that a lot of the shooting was done, by each sub-section in turn, from a dummy pit situated about 250 yards to the right of the actual battery position. In spite of this, the enemy batteries were frequently active in area shoots, and the battery came in for a full share of stray shells.

On June 4 a R.F.A. Battery of 18-pounders on the right of the position was heavily shelled. The camouflage covering was set alight, but with help from men of the 27th Battery the fires were ultimately extinguished, but not before practically the entire ammunition stock on the position had been destroyed.

Batteries were being shelled daily in the neighbourhood, and, with the concentration of enemy artillery on such a comparatively small front, any houses which had been standing a week or so previous were soon reduced to a mass of bricks and dust. In comparison with the British Artillery in numbers of batteries and quantity of ammunition expended, it is probable the enemy concentration would be outclassed, but it is sufficient to give a realistic impression of what prevailed behind the enemy's lines for days previous to the actual stunt, and in the days of cleaning up after it.

On June 6, the night previous to the actual attack, the battery wagons were on the road with a full echelon of ammunition, and the arrangement usually adhered to was for the teams to wait at "Windy Corner," and proceed to the position to unload at intervals of about ten minutes. This night, all teams with the exception of the right section had got through without any hitch. This section, consisting of four wagons, had pulled up just in front of the battery when the enemy's guns opened up all of a sudden, and gas shells interspersed with H.E. began to rain on the position and the roads leading to it. The wagons were unloaded under difficulties—respirators having to be worn—and the teams were fortunate in getting away from the position without any casualties in men or horses. That night, all the district as far back as Romarin, a distance of two or two and a half miles behind the position, was reeking with the gas given off from the shells.

The bombardment continued until the early hours of June 7 when it abated slightly, and infantrymen marching up the roads to take their places in the attack went into the line with their respirators in position, many of the battalions sustaining casualties in the neighbourhood of Ploegsteert before even entering the trenches.

In one of the many raids carried out by the infantry previous to the actual day of attack, Mr. G. B. Owen went forward as Liaison Officer to the Raid Headquarters in the trenches near the "Post Office" in Ploegsteert Wood, where the raid was to take place. The 33rd Battalion were the raiders on this particular

night, and accompanying Mr. Owen were Bombardier M. T. Bourke and Gunner M. Linnane as linesmen. Gunner J. G. Cannan acted as telephonist. Their destination was a dug-out, where they arrived about seven o'clock in the evening, and were occupied in laying telephone lines until about 11 o'clock. The raid was successful, and Mr. Owen and the signallers returned safely about 4 a.m. the next morning after a narrow escape. While the raid was in progress a "Minnie" dropped just in the entrance to the dug-out in which the party were sitting, at the same time wounding an infantry captain, who subsequently died. His batman was severely wounded by the same explosion, as also were a runner and a signaller of the battalion.

Another raid was successfully carried out by the 38th Battalion. Mr. E. M. Neylan being the Liaison Officer, Gunners G. R. Bennett and J. D. Topp linesmen, and Bombardier Lundmark telephonist.

From May 22 onwards the wagon lines were in a paddock, the horse lines being in the open. Roughly painted on the gate at the entrance was a familiar sign bearing the words:—

“DINKUM AVENUE,”  
14,000 MILES TO GRIFFITHS BROS., FOR  
TEA, COFFEE, AND COCOA.

It was evidently the work of a previous "Aussie" occupant with a desire to give the surroundings a homely touch. This camp was only about a quarter of a mile from the previous one—generally referred to as "Marie's." There were a few huts, but the overflow had to live in humpies under the hedges.

There was an abundance of work for the drivers carting ammunition while preparations for the push were in progress. Hostile and Allied aircraft were very active, and the kite balloons situated near the wagon lines were frequently attacked by enemy planes, and to witness one of these balloons brought down and the attacking 'plane running the gauntlet of anti-aircraft and machine-gun fire—usually about dusk—was an exciting sight. These balloons were inflated with a particularly slow burning gas, and before the envelope showed signs of being ignited several seconds frequently elapsed. The observers would usually have time to jump clear with their parachutes before the flames grew too intense. Once the flames and smoke appeared it was only a matter of seconds before the only trace of what had been there was a shower of sparks and a thick trail of dense black smoke, and a small black object—the basket—making for the ground. On June 2 leave of any kind was prohibited and men were not allowed to leave the wagon lines without a special permit. On June 5 tear gas was thick over the wagon lines in the early hours of the day.

## THE MESSINES STUNT.

The bombardment covering the attack was timed to open at 3.10 a.m. on the morning of June 7, 1917, and punctually to the second the guns commenced firing. Every battery within hearing seemed to have a hand in it, and the bark of the 18-pounders blended with the boom of the heavies made the night hideous with the continual roar and scream of flying projectiles racing for the enemy's lines. At the same moment the attack was heralded with the simultaneous firing of nineteen mines at different points on the Messines-Wytschaete Ridge. Although there were a few individuals as far away as London who were able to hear the report of these explosions, there were many in the vicinity who were unable to say the explosions were distinguishable above the roar of gunfire. Very few knew what to expect, in spite of the tunnelling operations having occupied months of labour previous to the event, it having been kept a close secret. The flashes from hundreds of guns and the reflection from Verey Lights, star-shells, and signal-rockets of all colours almost turned night into day.

The gunners were considerably hampered at their work through having to wear their respirators during the night, as in spite of an easing off in the enemy shelling, the gas was still too thick to allow of free breathing.

The battery opened up at 3.10 a.m., and after five minutes the barrage lifted 125 yards, followed four minutes later with a further lift of 100 yards. The firing did not cease until 10.30 a.m., and by that time the guns were almost red hot. During the day the battery were engaged in dispersing enemy counter-attacks. As is well known, in this attack all objectives were gained by the infantry and held by them, the most minute detail being carried out with clockwork precision.

A determined counter-attack was made by the enemy about 8.30 p.m. on the evening of June 7, and the battery was again firing for a further two hours.

During the stunt Mr. Keith Harrison acted as forward observation officer. The signallers who accompanied him were Gunners G. R. Bennett, C. James, and F. W. Jowett, as telephonists, and Gunners K. Andrews and C. C. Tuplin as linesmen. The party started off from the battery with carrier-pigeons, telephones and reels of telephone wire about 8 o'clock on the evening preceding the advance. Their destination was a panel dug-out (R.D.2) situated in the front-line trench on the border of Ploegsteert Wood —on the side nearest Hill 63, and within a hundred yards or so of Antoine's Farm. There they had to wait until the allotted hour for the "hop-over" to be signalled by the firing of the mines, the two nearest of which were only about 300 yards distant and situated immediately under the enemy's front-line trench at Barricade Avenue.

The party was exceptionally fortunate in coming through without anything more serious than Gunner Bennett being wounded in the leg by machine-gun fire. The others had many narrow escapes—Gunner Jowett's skin being actually burned, also by a machine-gun bullet, but no wound was inflicted. Gunner James was also marked by a shell splinter, but not sufficiently to need hospital treatment. Gunner Bennett after some time in a shell hole—anything but a pleasant experience—eventually got to "Blighty," but returned to the battery about the month of September following. During the exceptionally heavy shelling it was practically an impossibility to keep up communication by telephone as the wires were blown to pieces almost as soon as they were run out. The party's objective was Grey Farm, some 800 yards behind the old enemy front line. This was reached, and an important message was sent back by pigeon calling for artillery fire to be directed on Potterie Farm, which, being strongly held by machine-guns, was giving a considerable amount of trouble to the infantry. For good work on this occasion Gunner Andrews was awarded the Military Medal.

Some 7,000 prisoners in all were taken on this day, the greater number of them being unwounded. From conversation with some of them it was to be gathered that the attack was irresistible, the infantry being on top of them before they could recover from the staggering shock received from the exploding mines. The intense artillery bombardment preceding the attack and accompanying it only a few men could live through, and a number of the prisoners had been hurried in to the line from Arras and other parts of the front. One wounded prisoner had been only five hours in action, that being his first experience. Numbers of them spoke of being days without rations owing to the impossibility of getting them up to the trenches.

Enemy counter battery fire after the initial advance by the infantry slackened considerably, but harassing fire still continued on the roads and prominent crossings.

At the battery during the stunt casualties were sustained. On June 5 A./Bdr. G. A. Jones was struck in the face by a flying splinter. On the 6th Gunner M. Linnane received a knock on the arm, and on the following day Gunner P. C. Macan was struck on the foot with a piece of shell, for which he received treatment in England—this being the second occasion the names of the two latter mentioned had appeared in the casualty lists. Just previous to the stunt Bdr. W. Moss was wounded by a piece of shrapnel in the groin, and although the wound was not considered in any way serious at the time he succumbed to his injury on June 8, and was buried at Steenwerck.

## LAWRENCE FARM.

*From June 14, 1917, to June 25, 1917.*

On the night of June 14 there was a full turn out from the wagon lines, the first line teams (which had been at immobile lines, together with all the spare horses, since June 1) also proceeding to the battery position with ammunition. It was a dark night and there was a considerable amount of traffic on the roads, and on arriving at "Windy Corner" (appropriately named) the gun limbers only proceeded to the guns, the wagons waiting until they were pulled out. A position was taken up slightly to the rear and on the right flank of the battery's old O.P. at Lawrence Farm, and about 2,000 yards nearer the front line than the position just evacuated. The track leading to the new position was a very narrow one and only permitted of traffic moving in the one direction. At the same time as the 27th were going forward other batteries of the 7th Brigade were changing positions, and in spite of a carefully prepared time-table for all, a considerable amount of waiting occurred on the roads. The guns were eventually got into position about 1.30 a.m. without mishap, and the wagons were unloaded, but the approaching daylight did not permit of a return trip to the old position for more ammunition. Some of the wagons loaded up there and had a hot time getting away, as H.E. bursts and gas shells were flying around the vacated pits, giving an impression that the Hun was venting his wrath on anything or anybody, having been baulked in his endeavour to stop the bringing forward of the guns.

While the guns were being put into position numerous gas shells were falling on all sides, and it was fortunate that none dropped among the wagons waiting to be unloaded, as G.S. wagons from the D.A.C. in addition to the battery's teams were all packed into one small paddock, and the result would have been disastrous. They returned safely to the wagon lines about six o'clock that morning.

The gunners here had much hard work before them. The position was a very open one and was in close proximity to the trenches, in addition to which an enemy observation balloon seemed to be watching the slightest movement from only a short distance away. The guns, of course, had to be camouflaged and dug in to the axles, the only cover being an almost imperceptible dip in the ground. Day shooting was not possible, so duty shoots were all carried out by night, and all movement had to be carried out with great caution to avoid being observed by the ever-watchful enemy.

Batteries in rear of the position were heavily shelled by day and the roads in the neighbourhood by night. The battery was particularly lucky to escape any serious attention in this respect,

for, with the exception of occasional time H.E., and some gas shells, the battery was unmolested. One night respirators had to be worn for about five hours, but this was the only occasion the troops' slumbers were disturbed from this cause. The weather for the first few days was all that could be desired, but this was not to last, and life became a miserable existence, sleeping as they did in a little hole in the ground or in a ditch with a piece of corrugated iron for a covering.

On June 25 orders were received to pull out of action, and about 8 o'clock the teams left the wagon lines, and all went well until arriving at the notorious "Windy Corner." At that spot the enemy batteries were particularly active on the roads, and the column was greeted with a salvo of bursts—probably 4.2's—and Driver D. F. Boyd collected a small splinter in the back, not sufficient, however, to incapacitate him. Driver Weir at the same time was practically blown off his horse, but without injury to either of them. The column then broke into a trot and got safely through in the darkness until the track leading off the Le Bizet Road, at Ploegsteert, was reached. Here a halt of some fifteen minutes, which seemed hours to those waiting, was necessary to allow vehicles coming down the track to get clear. This was a most trying wait, the shelling all around continuing without cessation. Heavy shells continually sang overhead, seeming to barely skim the heads of the mounted drivers before they "whanged" with a crash into the houses a hundred yards in rear. Gas shells in plenty with their mournful whistle and "plop" as they hit the earth also added to the cheerfulness of the outlook. Rain was falling heavily and the ground was sodden with water from the rains of the previous days. The column once again proceeded on its way safely until the track entered an avenue of trees and thick bushes, alongside the 26th Battery's position. Here the darkness was intense and whizz-bangs and 4.2's were falling on both sides of the muddy lane. D sub's gun limber was at the head of the column and had just entered the darkest portion of the track when with a screech and a bang a whizz-bang—percussion shrapnel—burst immediately between the lead and centre horses of their team, killing the four of them on the spot, the three drivers having a narrow escape from sharing the same fate. Driver R. V. Gall sustained injuries in both legs, while Driver F. Penhalluriack was injured in the back and suffered from shell shock. Driver J. J. Sexton also sustained shell shock. Only Driver Penhalluriack returned to the battery to duty some months later, Driver Gall losing one of his legs and, as in the case of Driver Sexton, was returned to Australia later.

It was an awkward position. The column's progress was blocked by the casualties in the leading team, there being no room for vehicles to pass one another, and there was the prospect of further shells landing in the same spot at any moment. The dead horses had to be rolled into the ditch at the side, and the wheelers, which only received a few skin scratches, were got out of the way, the limber being run up the bank on the one side. The wounded men

were then taken away to the dressing station about a mile distant, and the work was proceeded with to the accompaniment of gas shells and bursts of H.E. all around, which continued without ceasing until daylight the next morning, evoking from Major Taylor some time later the remark that that night was the most anxious one he had spent in France.

The guns were eventually pulled out to wagon lines, arriving there when the sun was well up the next morning, some of the wagons making good time along the stretch of Le Bizet Road in spite of the darkness and the state of the road, strewn as it was with débris of all kinds from shell fire.

On June 20 the wagon lines moved from "Dinkum Avenue" to Kent Camp, near the junction of the Bailleul and Neuve Eglise Roads. On the day of arriving there, while watering horses at the neighbouring troughs, a sudden attack, almost directly overhead, was made by several Fritz planes on the line of observation balloons, which at this time were at intervals of less than a mile apart all along the front to the northwards. The observers from several balloons made the parachute descent, and two of the balloons went down in flames.

This was a period of great aerial activity, and great numbers of planes were to be seen at almost any hour of the day or night, and it was seldom that the sky was free from the little white cotton-wool shrapnel bursts of our anti-aircraft guns or the heavier black "woolly bears" of the enemy's time-fuzed H.E. Within the next four days three more balloons were burnt in the immediate vicinity by enemy planes and two more further to the north of the wagon lines. On the evening of June 23 an enemy plane was brought down by the fire of the Steenwerck "Archie" battery not far from Kent camp. Men arriving on the scene shortly after its landing found very little of the plane left, the souvenir hunters accounting for most of it almost before the machine hit the earth.

On June 24 another balloon raider was hit by gun fire, but managed to struggle back to his own lines.

On the evening of the same day some heavy shrapnel bursts were directed by an enemy battery over Kent Camp, and on several occasions this was repeated, but without any damage being done.

It was while at this camp the battery had their first experience of bombing raids. At this time of the year the long days and starlight nights of short duration were admirable for bombing purposes. Hardly a night passed but the heavy drone of Fritz's Gothas would be heard, sometimes during the whole night from twilight until early dawn, and when he unloaded his cargo too close there would be the shout from the picket of "Stand to your horses!" and drivers in all stages of dress would make a blind dash for their horses. As it happened it was never necessary to evacuate at night, although some of the other batteries of the brigade did so, and the D.A.C. in the neighbouring paddocks suffered casualties in men and horses from bombs on these nightly

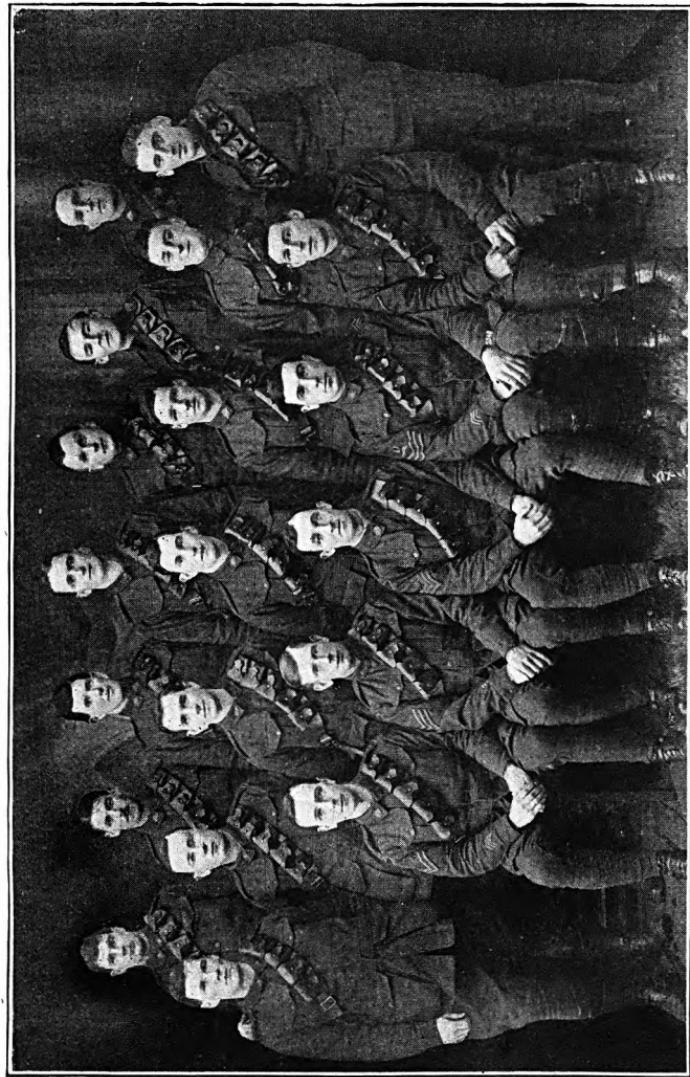
raids. Gunner W. Moon, who was transferred from the battery when at Strazaele, was killed by a bomb while in the wagon lines of the 30th Battery of the 8th Brigade.

On June 24—a Sunday morning—a church in the neighbourhood of Neuve Eglise during Mass was shelled by the enemy, and several women and children were killed and other civilians wounded.

From June 26 until July 2 the battery was out of action, and leave was granted to the men on some afternoons to Bailleul.

On June 27 the batteries of the brigades were inspected by General Monash, and were congratulated by him on their good work in the Messines offensive. He mentioned the fact that the highest praise the Artillery could gain was from the Infantry, and in this instance it was of the highest order from that arm of the division. On the following day brigade sports were held, and were attended by General Monash and General Grimwade. On June 29 General Plumer inspected the battery while carrying out their usual daily routine in the wagon lines.

On the evening of July 2, 1917, the right section of the battery again went into the line to take up a position on Messines Ridge.



"B" SUB-SECTION.

*December, 1918.*



## MESSINES RIDGE.

The gun teams of the Right Section left the wagon lines shortly before dusk, and by way of Neuve Eglise, arrived at Wulverghem, from whence the guns were to be guided in by Captain Peart. There was a number of heavy batteries in the neighbourhood, and, just at the time of passing, they seemed to be getting a fair issue of the products of the house of Krupp. After waiting some time, the column moved on and, at a point below Shell Farm, on the Wytschaete Road, turned off on to a track well pitted with shell-holes, but not entirely devoid of the rank grass usually found in the vicinity of our support lines.

It was a tortuous track, and almost impossible to follow in the darkness. Captain Peart preceded the teams on foot, pointing out shell-holes and the many danger spots on both sides. After about 500 yards of comparatively easy going, the original front lines and No Man's Land were crossed, and it was not until then that the ground became almost impassable. At two places it looked as if the guns would be bogged, with the prospect of an all-night job in getting them out, but good handling of the teams pulled them through; although drag ropes were attached, they were not really needed, as it was little help the gunners could give with such foothold. The main difficulty was getting an even pull on the traces in the teams, as at times, owing to the shell-holes being so close together, the wheels would be suspended over a hole on each side of the narrow track, and it was only sheer luck that the guns and limbers were not upside down in about five feet of mud and water. The greater part of the time, for the same reason, the whole strain would have to be taken by the wheelers, the lead horses in all probability being unable to put any weight on the traces, being themselves struggling to get up the sides of some slimy shell-hole further ahead. However, the guns got through the odd two miles with only two involuntary stoppages, the success being attributable entirely to good driving.

The guns were got safely to the pits, and the teams started the return trip, which was accomplished without casualties in spite of the track being shelled at different points.

It was not until daylight the next day that the true state of the whole district could be grasped. The entire stretch as far as the eye could reach was desolate waste, and every square yard of ground bore the mark of our artillery fire, and how any human being could have lived through the bombardment it is difficult to contemplate.

Looking back from the battery position from just under the crest of the Ridge, and in the direction of the old No Man's Land, the most prominent rise across the valley, and slightly to the left, was Hill 63. To the right of this hill and a considerable distance to the rear was Kemmel Hill, while immediately on the northern side

of the guns was L'Enfer, or Hell Wood, and the scene of hard infantry fighting on the day of the great advance. At this time those trees in the wood which had partially survived the storm of shells bore the traces of the fire, and were split and broken off where shells had struck them. On the south side of the guns were the remains of another small wood, and further still, but on the top of the ridge, stood the heap of bricks which once had been Messines.

A more desolate spot it would be hard to imagine, the clay soil showing up brown, with not a blade of grass anywhere to relieve the monotony of the scene. Occasional grey square blocks stood up here and there, marking an enemy concrete dugout which had escaped a direct hit, and above all the desolation hung the indescribable stench of the battlefield, from the bodies of Huns unburied and men once buried, but blown up a second time by successive shells.

Only the Right Section pulled their guns into this position, the other guns of the battery being taken over as they stood in the pits, the difficulty of changing over thus being obviated, and the gunners belonging to the other two sections went into action the following day.

The sector covered by the battery while in this position was from Steignast Farm on the northern side to Blauwepoort Beek on the south. The O.P. was for the first few weeks in an old whizz-bang gunpit behind the trenches, and later at Blauwen Molen, some distance in front of Messines, and there were many opportunities of picking up targets from observation.

The zero point used by the battery was—in the first place—“Kiwi,” and later on this was changed to “Garde Dieu Cabaret.”

Although the first weeks or so were comparatively quiet ones, the vicinity of the ridge was always being shelled, the greater number of those put over being high explosive shells with a “time” fuse, but set to explode too high to be very effective.

About the middle of the month the two guns of D and E Sub-sections were detached and took up a position to the right flank of the battery, the main object being to split up the battery with a view to additional safety. As time went on and it came nearer the stunt, which daily became more evident, the shelling increased, and the ridge was anything but a “healthy” spot to live on.

On the night of July 20, 1917, Gunner J. C. Eddy, B Sub.’s limber gunner, was wounded by a shell bursting on percussion two yards from the off gun wheel, a piece of the shell penetrating his steel hat and lodging in the back of his neck. The wound was not considered a dangerous one, and he eventually went to a hospital in England, returning to duty a little less than a year later.

On the following day Gunner J. Kirk had to be attended to for the effects of a new gas used for the first time in shells by the enemy. It was afterwards known as mustard gas, and causes temporary blindness and inflames the skin even through the clothing.

For the greater part of the time the enemy shells fell short by about 50 to 100 yards of the actual position, but occasional

rounds would be practically on top of the guns, keeping those whose duty did not take them outside well under cover.

Ammunition used to be taken up almost nightly, and before the wagons had completed their unloading they were often subjected to a heavy shelling before getting away and back to the plank road, which was usually considered fairly safe.

There were a number of narrow escapes at the position with the constant shelling night and day, and these were only to be expected. Two guns being out of action, due to the enemy's fire, the two detachments did not sleep in their usual dugouts on the night of July 22. The next morning it was found that both dugouts had been hit during the night and were unrecognisable. The same happened with No. 6 pit—a shell landing in the centre of it two hours after the gun had been pulled out, and escapes such as these were of almost daily occurrence. The Officers' Mess also "collected," but no casualties occurred on that occasion.

A tunnel was being constructed by the Tunnellers, running horizontally into the side of the ridge and just below the crest of the hill. This gave additional safety, and was constructed for the gunners to sleep in when not on duty; it was however, very muddy, and had about 6 ins. of water under, and over, the duckboards.

From July 21, onwards, ammunition was required in big quantities to cover the expenditure at the battery and to have a sufficient supply for emergencies. The wagons would have nightly trips to the position, picking up their loads either at "D.V.1" Dump, on the Dranoutre-Neuve Eglise Road, or at Stoppo Dump, close to Wulverghem.

Owing to the difficult nature of the ground the wagons were unable to get closer to the position than a spot about 300 yards away, which necessitated all ammunition being carried by gunners the remainder of the distance to the pits. The track led up the side of the hill to the back of the pits, and in the small hours, when the night is at its darkest, with rain overhead and thick, slimy mud underfoot, to the continual accompaniment of bursting shells, the men worked unceasingly.

It was on July, 27, 1917, that pack horses were resorted to for the first time, especially for getting shells to the detached section, which meant a considerable saving of labour to the gunners in consequence. On the night of July 30, 1917, while getting ammunition up with pack horses to the pits, Gunner L. J. Knox was killed by a shell bursting immediately in front of him. The horse he was leading at the time was unhurt.

"Stunts" or duty shoots were almost a nightly occurrence, consisting of 20 rounds or so per gun of harassing fire on the enemy's roads and communications, and sometimes these shoots took place two or three times a night.

On the night of July 23, 1917, three guns were put out of action by enemy fire, and had to be pulled out to ordnance.

The date of the attack was originally fixed for July 25, 1917, but so effective was the counter battery work of the heavies on the northern part of the front to be attacked that the enemy commenced

to withdraw his guns to places of greater security. Partly on this account the date of the attack was postponed for three days, which gave the airmen time to locate accurately the enemy's new battery positions. Subsequently, a succession of days of bad visibility caused a further postponement of the attack until July 31.

The front of the Allied attack extended from the River Lys, opposite Deulement, northwards to beyond Steenstraate, a distance of over 15 miles, and at 3.50 a.m. on the morning of July 31 the attack was launched and the bombardment opened. The battery continued firing without a break until close on 9 a.m., in which time approximately 500 rounds per gun had been put over. The operation on the battery's sector—being practically the pivot point—was not on a very large scale, the objective being to advance the line a matter of some 400 yards, and also to increase the area threatened by the attack, and so force the enemy to distribute the fire of his artillery.

On the north, in the Ypres sectors, the infantry attack was preceded by discharges of thermite and oil drums, and was covered by the usual barrage. Fortunately, the enemy's barrage was late and weak, and that day Hooge, Bellewaarde Ridge, Westhoek, and ground along the Ypres-Zonnebeke Road as far as Frezenberg were captured, these places being of special interest as the battery later on were in action in this part of the line.

During the day several shoots were necessary on account of enemy counter attacks, which died down, however, on the following day. Rain had been falling practically since the commencement of the attack, and the state of the ground was appalling, and on the slopes of the ridge foothold was well-nigh an impossibility. The men's uniforms were smothered with the thick clay, and the narrow tracks between the deep shell-holes, full of water, were a constant danger, especially after dark.

Some particularly heavy shells (about 11 inch) burst close to the position, evidently intended for any batteries sheltering behind the crest of the ridge. Just at daybreak on several occasions an enemy plane would fly over the position at a very low altitude to glean information as to the whereabouts of our batteries, but owing to the nature of the country not much information would be visible, with the exception of pathways leading to the pits, and these could hardly be made less noticeable.

It was a common occurrence for "S.O.S." calls to be repeated two or three times a night, allowing little time for anything but broken sleep.

Specially for the stunt, "A" Sub.'s gun was in an advanced position situated at D'Espagne Farm—the house itself having been used as a gun position by the enemy, as was evidenced by the gun-pit and a quantity of 7.7 cm. ammunition lying about. The gun was in this position less than 1,000 yards from the front line at its nearest point, for the special purpose of enfilading the Warneton Road from the Windmill, during the attack on the morning of July 31, 1917, the range being about 3,300 yards. Mr. J. J. Graham was in charge, Sergeant C. L. Chappell was

the number one, and Bombdr. R. G. Stewart, Gunners J. R. Gemmell, O. C. H. Farrant, and F. J. Cookesley formed the detachment. Just at the conclusion of the stunt Sergeant Chappell was rather badly wounded, but after some months in England he recovered, and for his work on this occasion received the D.C.M. Bombardier Stewart, who took charge after the casualty, received the Military Medal.

It was a "hot" place during the stunt, the farmhouse being a lone building, and probably a zero point for some of the enemy's batteries. In addition, old communication trenches ran alongside the farm, with the result that the building and its surroundings received more attention than was looked for. The ration party, consisting of two of the number, would walk back to the battery every afternoon, and it was a common occurrence for them to be chased back "home" considerably out of breath.

At the same farmhouse machine gunners had a Vickers installed for barrage work on enemy roads, and were firing at a range of about 1,800 yards. Part of the time they were Tommy gunners with an officer in charge, and the latter will probably remember his experience, as in the course of conversation he made the horrible disclosure that he had got "some of those things the men get!"

Later on the emplacement was taken over by Australian machine gunners of the 3rd Division.

The quarters while at this position—known as "S.C."—were moderately comfortable until the rain started and nearly flooded them out, and in spite of the presence of a dead Hun in the next room who, for a very good reason, was left severely alone.

About ten days after the stunt the gun was moved to an open camouflage position about 400 yards to the north of D'Espagne Farm, and for the most part shot only on S.O.S. calls. The weather clearing later, there were a few opportunities for sniping traffic on a road in the neighbourhood of Comines, but owing to three hostile observation balloons looking down from different points the probability of giving the position away did not allow of many shoots.

About this time Mr. K. C. Radford and Mr. W. H. Eales came to the battery.

From the days following the stunt until about August 12 the activity of the battery gradually decreased, until on that date they only shot in response to S.O.S. calls from the infantry. The enemy's batteries, however, still continued to shell the Ridge, and on several occasions his fire was directed on the position in particular.

On August 10 the position was under fire again, the shelling commencing about midday. At 2.30 p.m. a shell landed on one of the dugouts just on the outskirts of the wood, causing the heavy beams, concrete "bursters," and earth on the top to fall in. There were five men inside, and two of them, unfortunately, were killed—Driver H. Jackson (the Major's batman) and Gunner T. Roff. The other three escaped; they were Gunners E. Wheeler, F. Robinson, and T. B. Hayes.

Some days later, after an intervening spell of quiet days and following a night of heavy shelling, on the morning of August 25 the battery was again subjected to heavy fire, and shells were bursting indiscriminately all over the position. The cookhouse, situated as it was immediately behind the concrete dug-out, narrowly escaped a direct hit, and several men who were at the cookhouse at the time had narrow escapes.

"F" Sub.'s gun and detachment were also most fortunate, a shell penetrating the shield just above the rocking bar sights and burying itself without exploding just behind the trail, while Gunners J. Busby and J. Greatorex were on the gun at the time. The others wounded while in this position, but who returned to duty within a short time, were:

Bombdr. M. T. Bourke, on 22/7/17;

Driver H. Baldwin, on 30/7/17;

Gunner J. Busby, on 2/8/17; and

Gunner J. Greatorex, on 2/8/17.

At the wagon lines at Kent Camp, during the first fortnight in July, things were pretty lively in the way of bombs by night and shells during the day.

On July 3 the men at the wagon lines were lined up on the roadway to cheer as the King drove past in a motor accompanied by the Prince of Wales and several officers of his staff; Mr. Holman was also among the party.

On July 11, about 8.30 a.m., an enemy shell burst on the main road in front of the W.L., and within the next few rounds four shells burst within twenty yards of the centre of the horse-lines. Three horses had to be destroyed and four others were wounded. At the first shell the whistle went for the men to stand to their horses, and on their way over they were in time for a couple of shells that burst practically in the lines, but no men were hurt. No time was wasted then in getting the horses away into a paddock not far off. Fortunately the Hun stopped shelling before midday, so the horses were got back on the lines again, and the usual routine was not seriously impeded.

The same day enemy planes brought down in flames three of our observation balloons in the neighbourhood.

A Brigade Horse Show was held on July 14, General Grimwade judging the teams and wagons entered for the best turn-out. During the proceedings Fritz was running an opposition show in the way of trying to wing one of our observation balloons nearby with time shrapnel. He evidently made it too hot for the observers, as they eventually had to take to their parachutes, and one looked like falling in the middle of the Horse Show, but was carried by the wind to the other side of the Bailleul Road, where he landed safely.

On July 19 the wagon lines were moved to a paddock not far distant from the village of Dranoutre. It was a quiet place away from the main roads, and on arriving there everything looked fresh

and green. It was a picturesque spot in comparison with other wagon lines, being situated in a hollow, and the slopes of the neighbouring hills being wooded and covered with undergrowth.

Humpies, shacks, and tents of all descriptions, made out of any old thing from a waterproof sheet to a tarpaulin, soon sprang up in one corner of the paddock, the only hut on the selection being used by the Quartermaster-Sergeant and his etceteras. It was not until later that at Fritz's suggestion sandbag dugouts came into vogue. Most of the drivers' "long-faced cobbers" were on open picket lines, there being room for only a couple of subsections in the stable.

On July 22, 1917, a Divisional Horse Show was held in the neighbourhood of Westhof Farm, and for many days previous the air had been filled with the noise of neck chains being burnished and bad language. The night previous to the show there was a complete turn-out with ammunition for the battery, the full meaning of which was that most of the parts already cleaned would have to be dirtied just for the sake of getting a few rounds of ammunition up to the position. It seemed preposterous to the drivers, who by this time were worked up to such a pitch of enthusiasm that the war was quite a secondary consideration. However, they made up for the set-back, and on the day of the show the teams started out, looking their best and confident of the result. It was, therefore, much to be regretted that "A" Sub.'s gun team in going down a steep hill with the limber only, and no brake, the wheelers lost their foothold and slid some yards on the rough metal, injuring their legs and necessitating the battery scratching their entry.

On the hill opposite the wagon lines and screened by the trees on the gradual slopes about fifty or sixty tanks were garaged, and it was an interesting sight to see them manœuvring for the first time. It was here the King inspected them on his visit after the Battle of Messines. They moved out, however, on July 22, making for a destination further north and somewhere near Dickebusch.

While at these wagon lines bombs were once again a nightly occurrence, and as soon as the sun disappeared the monotonous hum of Gothas would be heard, and then the shout of "Lights out." Their objective seemed to be, usually, the aerodrome not far away, but they often varied the programme and dropped a few in the neighbourhood, but without doing much damage.

On August 30 the detached section's guns were pulled out to wagon lines, and the remainder of the battery on the following night.

On the morning of September 1 the battery moved out for the second spell, which was expected to cover a period of, at the least, four weeks.

## THE SPELL AT MERCK.

The battery moved off at 8.30 a.m., the stopping place for the night being Staples, a small village about three or four kilos from Hazebrouck. Here the lines were in an open paddock, and the men were billeted in barns.

The second day (September 2) was a long march, covering about 25 miles, before Merck-St.-Liévain, the destination, was reached.

The daily routine was, as usual, parades, grooming, and harness cleaning, with guards and pickets all "Kiwi" and "Brasso" mounting in the evenings.

Fauquembergues was a neighbouring town, but a little too far away to be regularly attended after parade hours.

On September 5, 1917, a paper-chase was organised for Numbers One of the Brigade. Sergeant-Major Lowe, Sergts. Cobbett, Williams, Barclay, Howard, and Carruthers were starters from the 27th Battery, but were unsuccessful in pulling off the event.

Nothing of great interest took place during the battery's stay at Merck, excepting perhaps the old well-worn rumour was again a strong favourite—that of the Australian Division's almost immediate departure for Egypt. What the Major's batman heard the Colonel's groom's cobber say at Headquarters would be taken as final, and a number would decide for applying for eight days' "buckshee" in Cairo right away.

There were other tales of special dust caps being issued to the "Divvy Sigs" for use in the desert, and sea kitbags and sun helmets being issued to some battalions of the infantry. It was also alleged that in orders read on parade at a neighbouring infantry camp the men had been told they would shortly be leaving for a "warmer climate." As it happened, after events seemed to bear out this statement, but not in the light of having any connection with the weather.

On September 7, after five days' spell, preparations were made for a start on the return trip to the line the following morning. It was a sudden change in the arrangements, especially as rumour had it that the battery was "out" for any time up to two months, and the troops were not exactly cheered at the prospects of coming to grips again so soon.

However, "c'est la guerre," as the natives express anything a little out of the ordinary, and that had to cover the misfortune in this instance.

By 8 o'clock the following morning the battery was in column of route and making for Flechem, the stopping place for the night,

and this village was reached about 5 o'clock in the evening. The next day's march was to Morbecque, by way of Aires, and the usual farmhouse billets were occupied there. Before the parade was dismissed Major Taylor spoke a few words, from which it was to be gathered that the battery were going into action in a warm corner. In spite of this prophecy—or on account of it—the "bock houses" did big business that evening.

The following morning reveillé rent the air at 4.30, and in the pitch darkness the first difficulty was to find the horse lines. This done, and the orders being to "carry on grooming," the next problem was to find the right horse, and matches had to be resorted to to recognise their outstanding points. A certain gunner, always to be found where the work was heaviest, had nearly completed grooming a cow belonging to the farm when to his disgust he discovered certain features not usually associated with those noble animals which were the cause of the institutions called "wagon lines" being invented.

Just before moving off at 8 o'clock that morning Mr. H. S. Nurse joined the battery, Mr. E. M. Neylan transferring to the 26th Battery, as Captain, the same day. The day's march was via Hazebrouck, Abeele, and Reninghelst to Dickebusch, which was reached in the late afternoon of September 10.

## YPRES (GORDON HOUSE).

The Dickebusch wagon lines were open lines in a well-worn paddock devoid of any kind of grass or vegetation. They were situated about two hundred yards from the main Dickebusch-Ypres Road, and the usual summer residences in the way of humpies and tents had to be built. All along the main road clouds of dust were to be seen continually rising above the trees and buildings, and all roads were packed with batteries pulling in to wagon lines and an endless stream of motor transports and all kinds of traffic imaginable.

In the immediate vicinity of the lines occupied by the Twenty-seventh were the other batteries of the brigade, and there was not a spare piece of ground anywhere that was not occupied by men or horses. It was very easy to understand that a push was shortly to take place, and any attempt to hide the preparations from enemy aircraft would be impossible. A network of light railways, with steam and motor engines, connected the forward dumps with railhead, and a small junction of these lines had to be crossed on entering the battery's lines from the main road.

The first night at the wagon lines was somewhat lively, as, in spite of the distance from the line, the enemy put over a number of rounds of H.E. and gas in the immediate neighbourhood, evidently intended to harass movement on the roads, of which there was little abatement, if any, at night.

The first morning in the new camp was marked by heavy shells—probably 8-inch—singing over the lines and lobbing some distance in the rear. The first round appeared to burst in the middle of the tents in the lines occupied by the Twenty-sixth Battery, and it was afterwards found that the one shell inflicted as many as forty casualties, eleven men being killed outright or succumbing to the effects of their wounds. The subsequent rounds were fired at targets further to the right, and the damage done by them was not ascertained. It was almost an impossibility for a shell to burst anywhere behind the lines without casualties occurring, the different wagon lines and infantry camps being so close together.

On the evening of September 11 the guns were taken into action at a position a few hundred yards from the Menin Road and not far along that road from "Hell Fire Corner."

To reach the position the main road through Ypres had to be followed, and the exit from the city was by the Menin Gate. Although a town with a pre-war population of about 17,000, there were only a few buildings still left standing, and even at this stage

of the war the historic old ruins of the city were belted almost daily with enemy shells.

On reaching the crest of the hill outside the city above the Menin Gate where the road branches to the right to Menin and, if followed straight ahead, leads to Potjes and Zonnebeke, the danger zone was again entered. A few hundred yards down the Menin Road stood the dressing station, with always a number of motor ambulances standing outside waiting to convoy the wounded to stations further back. Next door in a dilapidated old house hot cocoa was served out at all times of the day or night, and was particularly refreshing to men who had spent all night packing ammunition or had had a long walk down from the battery. A little further down the road heavy batteries of artillery had their positions, and from there onwards past "Hell Fire Corner"—which name was painted up in big letters and evidently intended to cheer passers-by—the surface of the road got worse, and on all sides the evidence of enemy shelling was apparent. Dead horses and mules, wrecked G.S. wagons and upturned charred motor lorries completed the scene of wanton destruction.

The first few days at the battery were full of hard work getting in big supplies of ammunition, and on September 13 the battery was subjected to a heavy bombardment with gas shells. Fortunately there were no casualties that day, although the dug-outs for the men were only holes in the ground with cupolas for a covering. The guns were close together, and were flanked on both sides with hedges. The usual camouflage covering completed the screen from observation. The battery, while in this position, had to endure a considerable amount of shelling, but the bulk of it was small stuff, with the exception of a number of rounds fired by a high velocity gun—commonly called a "toot-sweet" (tout de suite)—which on one occasion narrowly escaped hitting the Major's dug-out. One night a dug-out occupied by two gunners was nearly hit by a small shell which landed about four yards away. The following night a similar shell landed about two yards further off. The Major the next morning comforted the occupants with the remark that the Hun was getting further away every time!

On September 15 two barrages were put up by the battery in conjunction with other batteries, the first one consisting of 100 rounds per gun and the second of 80 rounds. These were repeated on September 18 and also on September 19, and were covering raids on the enemy's trenches, and also constituted a preliminary bombardment for the real advance which was to take place on the morning of September 20.

The chief form of diversion during the day was watching the unfortunate users of the Menin Road dodge heavy shells which from time to time burst with a shower of earth either on the road or close to it. Many a "Marathon" took place along that road, and there were some exciting finishes, and it was not always by

any means that the shells were beaten, as the inanimate forms of men and horses by the roadside showed.

The O.P. used by the Major for ranging was on the Bellewaarde Ridge, the zero point being about the centre of Glencorse Wood.

On September 15 there were casualties at the position, and  
Sergeant W. D. Howard,  
Corporal R. G. Stewart,  
Gunner H. D. Denyer,  
Gunner L. E. Carter,  
Gunner A. E. L. Bissett,

had to be treated for light wounds. They were not of a serious nature fortunately, and all returned to duty with the battery within a short time.

Drivers D. F. Boyd and W. J. Snell were both wounded on the night of September 18 while with the teams on the homeward trip after bringing up ammunition. They had delivered the ammunition safely and had reached the plank road when a shell burst, wounding Driver Snell in the leg. Driver Boyd's wound, however, was only slight, and the former got a trip to "Blighty" out of it.

During the night of September 19-20 rain again fell steadily, and when dawn broke thick mist made observation impossible. At 5.40 a.m. the barrage opened, and the infantry attack was launched and the battery continued firing until 1.30 p.m. the same day.

The front selected for the advance was from the north of Hollebeke to a point on the north of Langemarck, a distance of just over eight miles and the average depth of the objectives was 1,000 yards.

The objectives on the front on which the Australian infantry advanced, and which was being covered by the Twenty-seventh, were the remainder of Glencorse Wood and Nonne Boschen, and these were attained early in the day. Before 10 a.m. the "Aussies" had taken the hamlet of Polygonveld, and the old German third line to the north of it. Sharp fighting took place at a strong point known as "Black Watch Corner" at the south-western end of Polygon Wood. By midday this had been captured, the western portion of Polygon Wood had been cleared of the enemy, and the whole of the objectives on this part of the front had been gained.

As the result of this operation the whole of the high ground crossed by the Menin Road, for which such desperate fighting had taken place during previous attacks, passed into British possession. In the attack, as well as in the repeated counter attacks which followed, exceedingly heavy casualties were inflicted on the enemy

and the total number of prisoners captured on the whole front during this advance was 3,243, together with a number of guns.

In the afternoon and evening of the same day the battery was engaged in beating off counter-attacks which were successfully repulsed.

During the day several hundred prisoners passed the battery on their way to the prisoners' cages. Many of them were wounded, and all bore the traces of the bombardment by the dazed, vacant look on their faces.

Two signallers, Bdr. M. T. Bourke and Gnr. T. H. Burrett, were detailed from the battery to go over the top with the infantry when the attack opened, and their orders were to report to the 9th Battalion of the 3rd Brigade, 1st Division, on the morning of September 19 at their camp in Dickebusch. This battalion left camp about 11.30 p.m. that night to take up their station in the line for the attack in the early hours of the following morning. It was not a particularly long march—not more than 5 miles—but the night was spent in getting there. The route taken was by way of Warrington Road and Oxford Circus, but owing to the heavy traffic on the roads the column was continually being halted. Their first casualties were sustained while halted in Chateau Wood, as the enemy, evidently expectant, kept a continual fire with 4.2's and 7.7 cms. on all tracks leading to the front line. The battalion arrived in the front-line trench just in time to go straight over as the barrage opened. C Company led the advance, and with them went the battery's signallers in the first wave. A good deal of confusion was caused by the enemy's counter barrage, and the companies got considerably mixed up. Little opposition was met with, and to prove the thoroughness of the artillery's fire, not only were the enemy trenches full of dead, but hardly a machine gun was heard to fire until about 10 a.m. that morning. The signallers' orders were for Bdr. Bourke, with three signallers from other batteries, to proceed to Polygon Wood and keep in communication with the signal lamp with the other party of four, including Gunner Burrett, whose station was at Nonne Boschen, who in turn were to pass on messages to Hooge, where Col. Macartney was stationed. The 7th Brigade sustained no casualties among their signallers, but the 8th Brigade, however, lost one killed and two wounded.

On the night of September 21 the guns went forward to a position on the further side of the Menin Road, and slightly to the left front of Chateau Wood.

In the meantime, the drivers at the wagon lines back at Dickebusch had been having their full share of work in getting ammunition from the main dumps during the day and taking it to the position nightly. The wagon lines also received their quota of enemy shells, Hun batteries being particularly active on back areas, and especially so by night. Most of the shacks had been "dug in" to a depth of a foot or so in order to avoid the splinters from shells lobbing too close. At the Dickebusch lines the men had their first experience of daylight bombing raids. Fortunately the

bombs dropped were not in the immediate neighbourhood, but to have as many as fourteen Gothas with their attendant scout planes circling overhead about 2 p.m. on a summer afternoon is anything but a cheering experience.

Several raids were carried out at night, and the usual precautions as to lights being visible after nightfall had to be taken.

On the afternoon of September 16 Major Nicholls, of D.A.H.Q., while walking past the 27th Battery's lines on the railway line had a narrow escape, an armour-piercing shell exploding within a few feet of where he was walking. On the following morning during stable parade about half a dozen shells of a similar nature burst within a few yards of the line where the staff horses were picketed. About midday an Army Service Corps driver was watering his horses at the trough used by the battery when a shell burst by his side blowing one of his horses to pieces and destroying a length of the troughing, he himself escaping with no more than a scratch on his hand. That afternoon the lines were removed to an open paddock not previously used as wagon lines, some distance in rear of the previous camp, and in a considerably quieter spot, being situated between Dickebusch and Ouderdom. There was an ample supply of good grass in the vicinity, and it was altogether a healthier place for men and horses.

On the following night to taking over these lines bombs were dropped in the vicinity, and there were some anxious moments for everybody while the raid lasted. One of our observation balloons was brought down by an enemy plane on the morning of the 21st, the day following the "hop over."

While at these wagon lines a battery dry canteen was started on a sound basis, Gunner L. L. Paul (equally well known as "Cobber") being in charge. Although the canteen had some hard times getting stores, it was a boon to the men in many ways.

## CHATEAU WOOD.

This position, in the immediate vicinity of a much-used road, turned out to be a very rough possey, and was only occupied for twenty-four hours. Immediately in front of the battery was Westhoek Ridge, which, further to the right, joined Bellewaarde Ridge, and on the crest of this ridge infantry in reserve had their dug-outs in a trench, and the movement there consequently drew a considerable amount of the enemy's fire. In addition, the battery was under direct observation from enemy kite balloons.

-On the morning of September 22, during ranging, an unfortunate accident occurred in the way of a premature in one of the time-shrapnel shells fired by one of the guns of the battery. The shell burst just on the crest of the ridge, and three Australian infantrymen were killed and twenty wounded. The guns were in the camouflage pits, and had practically no protection from splinters.

The first night spent at this position was got through safely, in spite of a great number of time-shrapnel and H.E. shells being put over by the enemy, but the men were absolutely tired out by their work of the previous days, and sleep, even under these conditions, was not difficult.

At this stage of the offensive an attempt to cover any movement was impracticable, and presumably it was only that the activity extended along the whole front of eight miles or so, that more of the enemy's harassing fire was not directed on any one point. In the neighbourhood of the battery, situated as it was at the side of the plank road, from dawn until dark the road and side tracks were packed with every description of traffic. Working parties were everywhere, and the place resembled a huge ants' nest, hundreds of artillery drivers with pack horses were picking their way along the congested roads removing 18-pounder and 4.5 howitzer ammunition from vacated positions and taking it to new positions further in advance. Pioneers and engineers were putting down planking, making transport possible, where otherwise wagons would sink in the shell holes over their axles. Gun detachments with drag-ropes hooked to their guns were pulling them out by inches from quagmires where horses would be useless, while immediately behind them, with probably no cover over them at all, 60-pounders and 6-inch howitzers would be blazing away and making a further addition to the infernal din all around. Up above all this, our planes and those of the enemy were taking part in a war of their own, and, when they were not so hopelessly intermixed as to make shooting at those of the enemy a danger to our own, the sky would be filled with the little cotton wool flakes and black puffs of the anti-aircraft batteries of both sides. This day

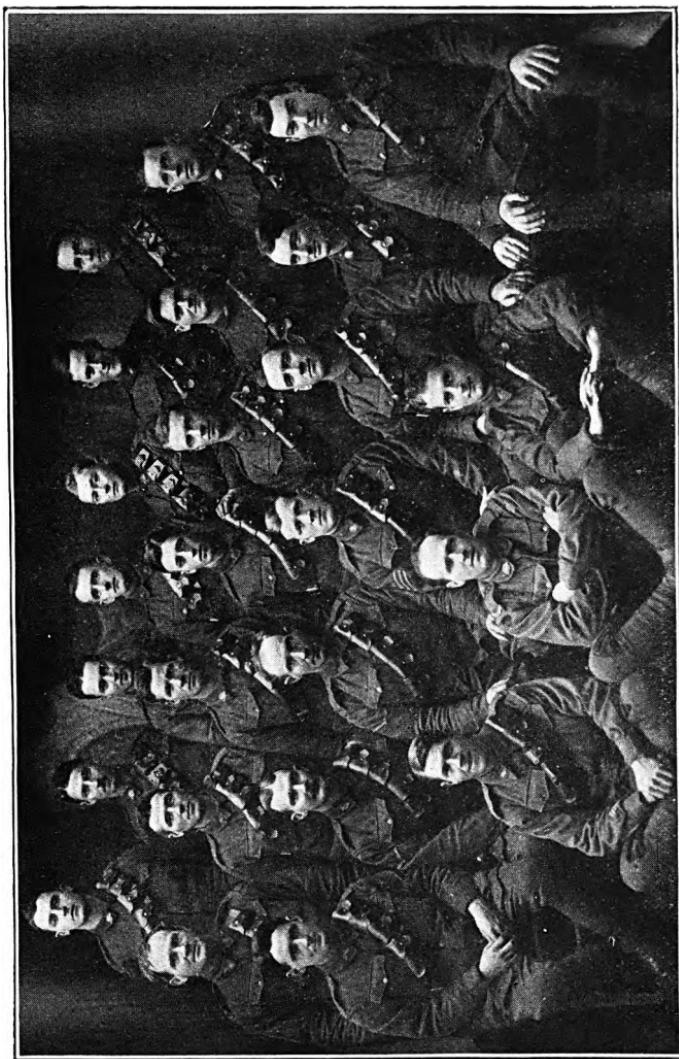
enemy bombs were dropped from planes along the Menin Road, which at this period was about as busy as Piccadilly Circus on a Saturday afternoon.

It was during the afternoon of September 22, 1917, amid these surroundings that Bombdr. G. A. Jones was killed by a shell bursting immediately behind the guns.\* Sergeant Carruthers had a very narrow escape with the same shell, and a little later No. 2 and No. 5 guns were put out of action and "A" Sub.'s buffer was damaged. Just behind the battery and at the side of Chateau Wood time-shrapnel was continually bursting, and it was almost an impossibility for a shell to burst without causing casualties.

That night the guns were taken forward a distance, in a straight line, of about 600 yards.

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\* He was buried the following day in Dickebusch Huts Military Cemetery.



"C" SUB-SECTION.

*December, 1918.*



## BELLEWAARDE RIDGE.

In getting the guns to this position, which was just below the crest of the Bellewaarde Ridge, a good deal of bad ground had to be traversed, but the move up was accomplished without casualties. The guns had to be dug in, as usual, entailing more hard work for the gunners, and ammunition had to be carried to the pits. The guns were about 100 yards to the left of the Glencorse Wood track and for the first two or three days all ammunition had to be "packed" up this track and dumped at the nearest available spot to the battery, and from there man-handled to the pits. Subsequently this track was planked over, enabling the wagons to proceed up the track to a point on a level with the battery, thus obviating the arduous work of packing for the drivers and horses. To the right of this track and in view of the battery, as many as eight derelict tanks were stranded, being put out of action in a previous advance. At the top of the track the anti-tank gun, which probably did all the damage, was still in its position. The nature of the ground resembled the previous positions the battery had just occupied, although the number of shell holes around was probably greater and most of them at the time were full of mud and water owing to the previous rains.

September 22 and 23 were days of continual shelling, and an enemy barrage was opened on all roads and tracks in the vicinity and on the Menin Road in particular. This caused blocks in the traffic, necessitating halts for as long as two or three hours at a time on the roads, and making one trip to the battery with ammunition occupy anything between twelve and eighteen hours. It was also impossible for the wagons to get nearer to the battery than about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles for two days, and to get this distance a route via Warrington Road had to be taken as far as Oxford Circus, and the wheelers would return with the wagons from a point about a quarter of a mile further on. The lead and centre drivers were provided with the necessary packs, and carried the ammunition the remainder of the distance in the course of three or four trips backwards and forwards—dangerous and heavy work, usually lasting until about daylight the following morning.

On September 23 three men of the battery were wounded:—

Bombdr. R. G. Brooks—for the second occasion

Bombdr. J. Busby        "",        ""        and

Gunner A. E. McKean.

The latter's wound did not prove serious, and he returned to the battery shortly afterwards.

At 5 a.m. on September 24 the battery put up a barrage to cover a minor infantry operation. The remainder of the day was

marked by considerably heavy shelling of the ridge, slightly in front of the position. During the morning one of our planes was shot down by an enemy pilot, crashing down not far from the Menin Road.

The O.P. used at this position was only a short distance to the left flank of the battery, the ground rising sharply there, giving fair observation.

On the morning of September 25 the battery opened fire in response to an S.O.S. call at 4.30 a.m., and before midday they had put up two barrages. Strong counter attacks were launched by the enemy on this day, and parties of German infantry succeeded in entering our trenches north of the Menin Road. Heavy and confused fighting took place throughout the day, in which our infantry gradually drove the enemy from the limited foothold he had gained. His casualties in these many counter attacks were consistently very heavy, in addition to which he gained nothing of any importance.

On the afternoon of this day Driver H. Whitehead, as usual, left the wagon lines as driver of the mess cart, taking rations and supplies to the battery position. On account of the state of the roads a lead-horse and driver were needed, and on this occasion Driver J. H. V. Capper rode the lead-horse. Owing to the heavy barrage being put up by the enemy on the Menin Road, no traffic was permitted along that road further than Birr Cross Roads; they therefore turned off there, and after many narrow escapes and several halts, owing to the blockage of the traffic on the loop road, eventually reached the battery. Here a wait was necessary, as a few rounds of smoke shells were required for use early the following morning, and the orders from the battery were that they were to go back with the mess cart and bring them up to the battery. These orders, however, were countermanded at the last moment, as it was found that the drivers then at the position with pack horses could bring them along. They started therefore on the homeward trip, and instead of returning the way they had come, to obviate the many halts, Driver Capper suggested they should go straight up the Chateau Wood track and past the Hooge dump. This they did, and narrowly missed getting wiped out on the way. On turning into the Menin Road they found themselves held up by a teamless G.S. wagon, not far from where a big ammunition dump was still burning. They dismounted, and while attempting to get the wagon to one side to allow sufficient room, a shell burst close at hand, a piece of it striking Driver Capper in the back. He was not badly hurt, but at Driver Whitehead's suggestion, was in the act of again mounting and going ahead by himself when another shell burst practically at his horse's feet. The horse disappeared entirely, and, it is to be presumed, was blown to pieces; at the same time Driver Capper was severely injured in the face and head. The remaining horse in the shafts was bleeding profusely, and would not stand still to allow of Driver Whitehead lifting the wounded man into the cart, who, although himself helpless, was not unconscious. While endeavouring to get him into the back of the cart, another

shell lobbed by the wheel, riddling the cart with holes, and things looked as if neither of them were to get away from the place. It was an awkward dilemma—with the homeward track blocked and the nearest help at the battery, about a mile distant. So the horses' head was turned round and another start was made for the battery position, with the wounded man in the cart and a horse so weak that the driver could scarcely move it. However, they got back there and Driver Capper was taken away on a stretcher to the dressing station, but his wound proved too serious, and he died the following day.

Driver Whitehead then left the cart and led his horse the odd six miles to the wagon lines, thinking they would probably be able to patch it up, but it eventually had to be destroyed. It was found afterwards that Mr. Graham's valise which was in the cart at the time of the accident was actually riddled with holes, and a tooth-brush and other articles wrapped right in the centre were broken into small pieces.

For his doing on this occasion and in recognition of his previous daily trips to the many positions the battery had occupied, including many tight corners, Driver Whitehead was awarded the Military Medal.

On the following day—September 26—a further attack had been arranged, all the heavy fighting of the previous days not being allowed to interfere with the renewal of the advance as soon as the preparations had been made. The front of the attack on that date extended from the south of Tower Hamlets to the north-east of St. Julien, a total distance of not less than six miles. South of the Menin Road only a short advance was intended, but on the north of the Menin Road and on the front, a sector of which the battery was covering, the object was to reach a position from which a direct attack could be made upon the portion of the main ridge between Noordemdhoek and Broodseinde traversed by the Bevelaere-Passchendaele Road.

At 5.50 a.m. the battery opened up with a barrage covering the infantry assault, and after hard fighting, in which altogether 1,600 prisoners were taken, a success as brilliant as that of September 20 was achieved. Our infantry carried the remainder of Polygon Wood, together with the German trench-line to the east of it, and established themselves on their objectives beyond the Bevelaere-Zonnebeke Road. The same day other troops took the village of Zonnebeke, among other important gains further along the front. The inevitable counter-attacks followed, and the battery was called on no less than five times during the day. It was afterwards proved that our operations of the morning had anticipated a counter-stroke which the enemy was preparing for the evening of the same day, and the German troops brought up for this purpose were now hurled in to recover the positions he had lost; fierce fighting ensued, but along the entire front the assaults were beaten off.

In the meantime, owing to the constant shelling, the battery had sustained further casualties, and on the previous day Gunners J. G. Doig and J. Brown were both wounded, as also was Gunner A. C. C. Burstal on September 26. On the same day Gunner E. M. Brown was killed.

These were days of hard graft for every man of the battery, both at the position and wagon lines. Endless quantities of ammunition were required when S.O.S. calls and counter-attacks had to be replied to so frequently, and practically every shell fired had to be transported from dumps behind Vlamertinghe, a distance well over five miles, by wagons and finally by pack horses, at the rate of ten shells per horse per trip, over appalling roads by night, and frequently under intense shell fire.

During the morning of the advance Mr. Eales was wounded by a flying piece of H.E., and a little later in the day Major Taylor, while observing for enemy movement some distance forward of the battery, was seriously wounded.

The Major started out about 7.15 a.m. that morning, taking with him Bombdr. Lundmark and Gunner J. Kirk, to go as far forward as possible and pick out targets for the battery to shoot on as soon as the opening barrage was concluded. They had arrived at White House, a previous target of the battery, and in the enemy's country before the advance which took place that morning, and were about 200 yards in rear of the infantry, where they were still digging themselves in and consolidating their new line, when they observed some enemy snipers about 150 yards to the left and slightly in advance of them. An order had just been sent back to the battery by means of the signal lamp, for ten rounds gunfire from number six gun, when a 4.2-in. H.E. shell burst within a few feet of the party. There was practically no cover except that afforded by a shell crater at the side of the wrecked pillbox, and a splinter struck the Major, seriously wounding him. Gunner Kirk procured a stretcher, but at the same time four infantry stretcher-bearers came up, and the party took turn in bearing the Major back to the dressing station. He returned to Australia during the month of December following, previously having been awarded the D.S.O.

From that time Captain H. G. Rourke took command of the battery.

During the day a great number of prisoners passed the battery position, many of them were wounded, and those whose wounds were not already dressed received attention from Pte. Nation, the A.M.C. Detail attached to the battery at the time, who was down at the track with his box as soon as any prisoners came in sight.

On the night of September 27, with Bdr. T. D. Bridger acting as guide, a column of forty wagons from the D.A.C. conveyed about 3,000 rounds to the position, and every wagon managed to unload and get away safely.

On the following day the shelling continued, and Corp. F. Bradley and Gunner M. Linnane (for the third occasion) were wounded.

During the day orders came through for the battery to pull out that night, the guns to be taken over by the New Zealanders.

at the wagon lines. Half an hour before the teams arrived at the position to pull the guns out a particularly unfortunate tragedy occurred. Three gunners were in the act of dumping their kits at the side of the plank road, preparatory to leaving for the wagon lines, when at the same moment a 5.9 burst practically on top of them, killing Gunner J. W. Gale on the spot, and wounding Gunner E. M. Flower so seriously that he died the following day. The other gunner wounded was H. Turner, but fortunately his injury was not considered serious at the time.

It was a most unfortunate occurrence, as after safely getting through days of nothing but bursting shells, and being on the point of getting away to the wagon lines and comparative safety, a man was particularly unlucky to be struck down at the last moment, and the incident caused a deep contrast to the pleasure evinced by everybody at getting clear away from such an unwelcome position.

The gun teams and G.S. wagons with the usual battery stores arrived back at the wagon lines about 2 a.m. the following morning, and that day and the following night were spent in the lines.

On the morning of September 30 the advance party left for the next position the battery were to occupy, and took over the N.Z.'s guns there. This position in relation to the one just vacated, was a considerable distance to its left flank, and also in advance of it.

The same day the wagon lines were moved to an open paddock, practically adjoining the Ypres-Vlamertinghe Road, and only a few hundred yards from the latter township.

The other batteries of the brigade, including the D.A.C., were all camped near by in close formation, and in the same paddock.

Since being in action in the Ypres sectors from September 12 until the vacating of this position—a matter of seventeen days—the expenditure of ammunition per gun per day was 188 rounds, making the total for each gun during this period 3,197 rounds. The battery of six guns in the same time firing 19,182 rounds. These figures give the colossal total for Group—consisting of the eight batteries of the 7th and 8th brigades—as 153,456 rounds for the seventeen days.

## WILDE WOOD.

This position was roughly a quarter of a mile to the south side of the Ypres-Potijze-Zonnebeke Road, and about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles beyond the ruins of the village of Potijze. In front of the guns the rising ground was sufficient to mask their flashes from ground observation, the usual camouflage pits being the only remaining cover available.

Immediately behind the line of guns a very rough muddy track, full of shell-holes, made the connection with the main road, and on both sides of this track the other 18-pounder and howitzer batteries had their positions. In addition to which the usual complement of dead horses and mules and wrecked wagons had to be added.

Just in rear of the battery was a derelict tank, and there were also a number of them in the vicinity; they probably had done their work before being put out of action for the time being, and the majority of them were repaired and salved as soon as the circumstances permitted.

The tank close to the guns was used as the control, and the gun detachments lived in the usual scraped-out dugouts next to the guns. Further back there was also a disused trench more or less fit for habitation, and this was also used for sleeping quarters.

On September 30—the same day as taking over this new position—counter-attacks were recommenced by the enemy. Two attempts to advance with flammenwerfer north of the Menin Road were followed on October 1 by five other attacks in the area adjacent to that covered by the battery. Another attack followed to the south of the Ypres-Roulers Railway, and the battery had to put up two barrages during the day. The following day a further two barrages were fired, and with the exception of the temporary loss of some advanced posts to the south of the battery's sector, in the neighbourhood of Polygon Wood, all the attacks were repulsed, and heavy losses were inflicted on the enemy.

The same day, while removing a wounded infantryman on a stretcher, the two bearers were themselves both wounded by a shell bursting on the track immediately behind the guns.

At dawn on October 3 an S.O.S. came through from the infantry, and in addition to firing on that account, two more barrages had to be put up by the battery before the enemy's attempt was broken down.

The following day was fixed for a renewal of the advance against the main line of the ridge east of Zonnebeke, and the battery opened up at 6 a.m. with a range of 3,400 yards, increasing by hundreds of yards to 5,600 yards. The firing continued until 12.41 p.m., and during this time each gun of the battery got away 472 rounds, half the number being H.E. and half shrapnel.

The front of the principal attack on this day extended from the Menin Road to the Ypres-Staden Railway on the north, a distance of about seven miles, and was successful at all points. In the northern sectors and that covered by the battery, Australian infantry advanced beyond the Bevelaere-Passchendaele Road, storming Molenaarelsthoek and Broodseinde, and dug themselves in well beyond the crest on which these villages were situated.

As was particularly noticeable at the time, and in all operations undertaken in the weeks following, the day previous to a stunt almost without exception brought with it heavy rains and a gale of wind. This happened on the eve of this advance, and the spell of previous fine weather was broken, thus accentuating the credit due to the men responsible for the completeness of the success on the following day.

In this attack the enemy was met in great strength. In addition to the two German Divisions already in line, the enemy had brought up three fresh divisions with the intention of attacking in force the positions captured from him on September 26.

Our advance at 6 a.m. anticipated this attack by ten minutes, and the Boche infantry were forming up when the artillery barrage opened. In consequence his losses were most severe, in addition to the great numbers of prisoners taken. The destruction of these divisions brought up by the enemy for his intended attack also made immediate counter-attacks impossible, and the battery were not called on to fire on an S.O.S that day.

While at this position Mr. L. Robertson and Mr. J. R. J. Windeyer came to the battery.

From September 30 onwards, bombs were a nightly feature of life at the wagon lines, and as surely as the daylight faded, every evening Fritz's Goths would be heard churning their way along in the distance, the unmistakable drone of their engines invariably giving sufficient warning for lights to be put out in good time. Apart from that precaution, things would go on much the same as usual. The church tower at Vlamertinghe seemed to be a favourite landmark, as many of the bombers always made over in that direction, dropping a number of bombs in the vicinity. The class of bomb used at this time was of exceptional weight with a very high bursting charge; one dud that was dropped fairly close made the whole camp rock. It was said at the time that the ammunition originally made for minenwerfers was being dropped by enemy bombing machines, as a dud had been dropped in the Square outside the Cloth Hall at Ypres, and identified as such.

A bell tent, not occupied by any of the twenty-seventh, but just on the edge of the battery lines, was one night riddled with splinters from a bomb bursting a few feet away, but without doing any damage. On another occasion a bomb or aerial torpedo burst close to "B" sub. lines, killing one horse outright, and wounding six more, and of these one had to be destroyed.

On October 4 the lines were shelled by a gun of heavy calibre, but fortunately the battery did not suffer any casualties, although one shell landed and burst at the heels of the horses picketed on

"A" sub.'s line, during stable parade, when the drivers were grooming their horses. The shell landed, fortunately, in the crater made by a previous shell, minimising the effect of the burst, otherwise the damage done would have been considerable. As it was, two or three drivers were knocked over by the concussion and the horses broke the rope, but, miraculously, no one was hurt, nor were any of the horses wounded.

On the other side of the creek at which the horses were watered from troughs, several dugouts were occupied by Tommy engineers, and several rounds fell right in amongst them. Subsequent rounds were further to the left and killed a few mules in the D.A.C. lines.

A few days later the wagon lines were to be moved, and it was not until everything was packed ready for moving that orders came through that the change was cancelled, and the battery were to remain in the same lines.

Early on October 5 the teams went up to take the guns forward from the Wilde Wood position, the right section teams leaving the lines at 3 a.m., and the others following at specified intervals.

"A" sub.'s gun being temporarily out of action, it was taken straight to the wagon lines, and thence to ordnance, some ten kilometres away, and at that time situated on the Abeele Road.

## ZONNEBEKE ROAD.—POTSDAM.

At daybreak on October 5 the first teams arrived at the old position, and after the guns had been pulled out of the pits with drag-ropes, they made their way along the improvised track which joined the main road at the dressing-station corner. All along this track the positions vacated by the field guns were being taken by heavier artillery, which had moved up from positions in rear, and the road was frequently blocked temporarily with either a jibbing motor tractor refusing to do its "damnedest" or with a 6-in. howitzer up to its axles in mud being "heave-ho-ed" out of it by a string of gunners on the drag-ropes.

A couple of days previously a working party, consisting of gunners from the battery, had gone forward to prepare the pits at the new position, but these were not occupied, and a position some 400 yds. further to the rear was actually taken up.

The crest behind which the battery had sheltered at the last position was now well in rear, and the "cover"—what there was of it—consisted of a low embankment of earth, previously used by the enemy for M.G. emplacements; in addition to which, a cluster of concrete pill-boxes further to the right of the line of guns, and slightly in advance, comprised one of the enemy's old defences, known as "Potsdam Redoubt." Severe infantry fighting had previously taken place here on the morning of September 20 before the stronghold had been finally captured, and the number of dead, both of our own and those of the enemy—buried and unburied—in the vicinity told at what cost the ground had been gained.

To reach the position from Ypres the same main Zonnebeke Road would be followed, but instead of turning off to the right below the crest of the first ridge, at the dressing station, the main road had to be followed up and over the ridge. Once an avenue of trees leading up to the crest added to the local scenery, but by now all except the stumps had been blasted out of recognition, and the execrable track was now flanked by batteries of heavy artillery.

Apart from the counter-battery fire these batteries drew, the continual stream of traffic over the brow of the hill, and seen from the enemy's positions silhouetted black against the sky-line, was sufficient to make the crest and its vicinity a veritable death-trap. Never a day passed but men and horses were blown up or sadly mutilated while threading their way between the shell holes and débris, and life on these roads was as uncertain a one as any.

On the morning of the guns being advanced they were taken by the teams over this crest, and about half a mile down the gradual slope on the other side. The day was clear, and enemy planes were active; in addition to which, his observation balloons looked down on all the preparations and movement in our lines. Once over this ridge our objectives recently taken, and those still to be added to the list, were in full view. The village of Zonnebeke, not much more than a heap of bricks, lay in the hollow just ahead of the new battery position. In the distance on the ridge, and a little to the left, the church tower at Passchendaele could be distinctly seen, and from these points most of our territory would be under direct enemy observation.

The ground chosen for the guns to occupy was merely a succession of new and old shell craters, the recent rains having turned the whole place into a vast morass. The guns in consequence were no sooner off the road which ran alongside the position, than each in its turn was bogged, necessitating it being man-handled by the gunners, already tired by sleepless nights and restless days, to the spot where the pit was to be eventually. This done, more hard work was entailed in digging the pits and making some sort of rainproof covering for themselves to sleep in—should that opportunity arise—possibly to be glorified later into a “splinter-proof,” when a sufficient quantity of the never-ending ammunition had been carried to the pits.

The Officers' Mess was a concrete pill box about 100 yards to the right of the guns, and while occupied, safely withstood a direct hit from a “4.2” shell, which burst on one corner.

The control at first was immediately behind No. 6 gun, but it was afterwards moved to the right flank of the line of guns. Other dug-outs—some of them not much bigger than a fair sized dog kennel, but not as clean—were scraped out of the earth embankment a few yards in front of the guns, while the detachments had small shelters rigged up close to their pits.

Beyond the Mess dug-out was the embankment which marked the line of the Ypres-Roulers railway, so often mentioned in official communiqués.

On the evening of moving forward to this position the Battery had to supply an officer and two signallers for the Brigade O.P. and Mr. Windeyer with Gunners Canny and Craig started out to find the dug-out of which they had only the map reference. It was a dark night, and the trip took about three hours instead of about forty-five minutes which it would take to cover the distance in daylight. They followed the Zonnebeke Road, turning off to the left along the Roulers Railway track and branching off to the right again some distance along it, finally reaching a battalion headquarters, where they were directed to their destination on Abraham Heights. The track was an abominable one, not being made any easier to follow by the usual nightly “issue” of Fritz's gas shells. Before arriving at the concrete pill box which was the

O.P. they were in search of, the S.O.S. rocket went up—the red, yellow, and green balls of fire falling almost at their feet. They eventually arrived at eleven o'clock that night to find that the duty was of thirty-six hours' duration, and being without rations until some arrived from the Battery, they were in the meantime pleased to eat the bully and biscuits to be found in the haversacks lying around, and previously belonging to men who then had no further use for them.

The Battery's sector as seen from this O.P. extended roughly from the cemetery on the right of the railway cutting, and in which the grave-stones showed up white in the distance, to the church in Passchendaele on the hill on the left. The houses with their red bricks and red roofs were clearly distinguished in the village around the church. There was a good deal of uncertainty at this time as to the exact location of the enemy's line, the infantry themselves not knowing definitely the situation of his front line positions.

On the day following the Battery's advance they were called on to fire on an S.O.S. and also to put up one barrage to disperse hostile concentrations, and in this they were successful.

The same afternoon Fitter-Sergeant H. Meacham was caught by a shell, and so seriously wounded that he died in the C.C.S. at Poperinghe some hours after admission.

On the 7th October the rain recommenced, increasing the hardships connected with the life at the Battery. It was a miserable existence in the mud and slush, wet through with the rain, and clothing caked with mud day and night, with no adequate dug-outs even approaching immunity from shell fire or rain. For two or three days, still further increasing the discomforts, there was a shortage of rations, and bully and biscuits were the main items of fare.

On the 8th October the Battery put up two barrages during the day and fired in response to an S.O.S. that night, the hostile attacks being effectively repulsed. The rain continued all this day and everyone at the position was soaked to the skin. The attack was to be renewed the following morning, and the slippery state of the ground, combined with an exceptionally dark night, made the assembling of troops a matter of considerable difficulty. Some of the battalions going up to the attack passed the Battery about dusk. The East Lancs. and Manchesters had been on the road with a full kit up since seven o'clock that morning, and were just about dead beat with another two miles to go before reaching the starting point for the attack.

Some of the infantry were bivouacked, for a rest by the way, just in rear of the Battery position, and, just at dusk, the wonder is that the glow from the burning braziers they were using did not draw the enemy's fire.

It was afterwards said that owing to the appalling state of the track the infantry had to follow, some of the battalion only arrived just in time to take part in the attack, while others scarcely able to drag one foot out of the mud after the other were too late for the "hop over" that took place at 5.20 a.m. on the following morning, the 9th October.

The total length of the front on which this attack took place was over six miles, from a point east of Zonnebeke northwards to where our front joined the lines held by the French north-west of Langemarck. At that hour the Battery opened up and continued firing until 8.15 a.m. The attack in the main was successful, but on parts of the sector covered by the Battery the infantry were unable to hold all their gains. Australian and English infantry carried the line forward in the direction of Passchendaele and up the slopes of the main ridge, capturing two small villages, Nieuwemolen and Keerselaarhoek, and a number of strong points and fortified farms.

Mr. Robertson, accompanied by a signaller, Gunner Bennett, G.R., went forward as F.O.O. for this advance in the vicinity of the railway cutting, and at this point English troops were unable to hold the ground gained in the first instance, and were forced to retire a certain distance.

In the meantime at the Battery casualties had occurred during the barrage shoot. Intermittent shelling of the position was being carried out by enemy batteries, the first shell lobbing on the roadway to the left of the Battery, the second on the opposite flank, and the third almost a direct hit on A sub. gun, bursting by the side of the off wheel. The first phase of the shoot had been completed, and the detachment had just commenced firing on the second phase. Gunner O. C. H. Farrant, the No. 2 at the time, was killed, and Bombardier J. R. Gemmell and Gunner J. B. Porter were both wounded, their faces being splashed by flying splinters from the bursting shell. Their wounds, however, were not of a very serious nature, and they returned from hospital about six weeks later. Gunner T. O'Connor, who was also one of the detachment working the gun, had a narrow escape, being untouched, although immediately in rear of the other men. By the same shell that morning, Gunner Beardon, G.W., was wounded on F. Sub's gun.

All this time the call for ammunition was as heavy as ever, and the work of the drivers was harder on account of the state of the roads from the rains, the greater distance from the wagon lines to the position, and the daily congestion of the roads with traffic of every description, a trip to the line taking many hours in consequence. Owing to the harassing fire on the one and only road which served all the Battery positions in the neighbourhood, and along which all supplies and ammunition had to be transported, the traffic was often blocked for hours at a time. Motor transports frequently got bogged on the narrow road, holding up every-

thing behind them. Although the shell fire was at times intense, it was not by any means continuous except for perhaps one or two days. Had the enemy taken the opportunity which seemed so apparent, and continually shelled any one part of this main road, it would have been practically impossible to get any supplies at all to the advanced positions. There were probably good reasons why the enemy was unable to do this, and it was more than likely that the counter battery work of the heavies kept him fully occupied.

The greater part of the 18 pdr. ammunition had to be drawn from Oxford Dump, of which the 3rd D.A.C. were in charge. This dump was situated about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles from the Battery, the road in between frequently being shelled by heavy batteries. Working parties were continually patching up this road, and later on the greater part of it was planked over. Almost every day from thirty to sixty pack horses were required to take ammunition up to the Battery; sometimes the drivers would have to leave the wagon lines early in the morning, and in which case their four or five trips from the dump to the position would take them well into the night or the early hours of the following day before arriving back at the wagon lines.

On the 8th October ten drivers were up, each with his pair of horses, to take about 800 rounds to the position, which meant four trips from the dump to the battery for each driver. On this particular day no packs were allowed along the road which led to the Battery until after a certain hour in the afternoon, as some hundreds of pack horses from the many different batteries used this road and greatly impeded the work of repairing it. They were therefore only allowed to use it at certain hours, which necessitated cross country tracks being discovered, over shell holes, barbed wire, ditches, and country almost impassable on foot—much less so with two horses to lead, and both heavily loaded. It was a frequent occurrence for the poor beasts to slide into a shell hole and remain there upside down until relieved of the weight of the loaded packs, and then once again stagger on, plastered with mud to their eyelids, until the last trip was finished. It was the hardest work imaginable for men and horses, and especially so when the same horses and drivers were required almost every twenty-four hours.

On this day Driver Peebles, F.G., while packing, was wounded in the hand, eventually getting to a hospital in England.

On the same day Sergt. C. A. Cobbett was also wounded in the hand from a piece of H.E. shell which burst close to the Battery position. This injury was not a serious one, and he was treated at a field hospital, and remained on duty.

For the 12th October a renewal of the attack had been decided upon for certain reasons of strategical importance, in spite of the condition of the ground, which continued to deteriorate and the weather remaining unsettled. On the night of 11th—12th

October heavy rain commenced again, and after a brief interval during the morning continued steadily through the whole of the following day.

The attack was launched at 5.25 a.m., at which hour the Battery opened their covering barrage. The front on which the advance was intended was between the Ypres-Roulers Railway and Houthulst Forest. On the Battery's sector 3rd Divisional Infantry and New Zealanders were the attacking troops.

Owing to the valleys of the streams being impassable and there being heavy belts of wire entanglements uncut, the New Zealanders on the right of the "Aussies" were held up and consequently our infantry were forced to fall back to their original line. Further north on both sides of the Ypres Staden Railway all objectives were gained and about 1,000 prisoners taken. It was not until the 6th November that the village of Passchendaele was captured by Canadians who relieved the Australian divisions in the Ypres salient.

About this time Gunner Drennan found a Lewis machine-gun half buried in the mud on the roadway running alongside the Battery. It was afterwards cleaned up and mounted outside the Officers' Mess for use against enemy planes when the opportunity offered.

From the 15th October onwards the Battery did not do a great deal of shooting, only standing by for S.O.S. signals and retaliation when required. The same day the detachments were reduced to three men and a No. 1 per gun. Goths frequently came over our lines and bombed dumps and battery positions on clear nights, and some of the drivers had a narrow escape at Oxford Dump while loading up their packs with ammunition, but the bombs burst wide of their target, and on that occasion did little damage.

Heavy area shelling was indulged in almost daily by enemy batteries, and frequently the battery position and its vicinity were subjected to intense gun-fire from several batteries of different calibre at the one time, 4.2's and 5.9's up to 8in. being employed.

On the 12th October Gunner C. L. Young—a signaller—was wounded in the leg by a splinter from a shell bursting some distance away, and got to "Blighty" with his injury.

On the 15th October a 4.2 burst close to the Officers' Mess, splinters from it wounding Gunner H. F. V. George in the groin and Bombardier A. W. Johnston in the hand. The former had to have his leg amputated later, and Bombardier Johnston returned from a base hospital about six weeks later. The shell following the one that did the damage was a direct hit on the Mess dug-out, but the solid concrete successfully withstood the shock of the explosion.

The following day was one of exceptionally heavy area strafing by enemy batteries, and traffic on the road was held up on account of it. During the night previous "D" Sub's dug-out, in which

Gunner G. L. Drennan and a gunner attached to the Battery from the trench mortars, named Havard, were sleeping, was blown in by a shell and they were both killed. The same day Sergeant C. G. Ransone was killed while crossing from the road to the guns. He had joined the battery the previous July, and it was a most unfortunate occurrence, as he had been the No. 1 of "B" Sub. at the position through most of the previous stunts, and had been Acting Sergeant-Major during that time. He was a great worker and was very often to be seen with his tunic off and sleeves rolled up, humping ammunition to the pits, and he was usually in the thick of any hard work to be done about the Battery. It was but the day previous to his being killed that he went down to the wagon lines from the Battery position, and only a G.S. wagon that was in good condition and had been abandoned by the roadside, and a useful addition to the Battery's transport, took him that morning to the position. He also had with him some cigarettes and biscuits for the boys at the Battery, and it was while taking these over to the guns that he was struck by a shell bursting close beside him.

Several of the ammunition dumps at the pits were frequently set on fire, and on this day "F" Sub's gun was badly burned, necessitating its removal to ordnance for repairs. Towards evening the shelling slackened off, but it continued fitfully during the night, and was carried on with renewed violence the next day.

Casualties amongst infantry and others using the roads alongside the Battery were a daily occurrence, and on 18th October some Canadians working on the roads crossed over to the guns in the endeavour to find shelter until the shelling eased down, but four of them were killed on the position that day. "F" Sub's gun pit was also knocked in, but no one was hurt when that happened. When the shelling was at its height, it seemed incredible that a gun or any living thing could survive for any length of time, more particularly as the guns' only protection was a strip of camouflage, and the gunners' a cupola roof which would not stop even a fair sized splinter. Quite a number of the shells of the heavier calibres were armour piercing shells, and provided they landed in a vacant spot did no more than send up a fountain of earth and spray, emptying the old shell craters adjacent of the rain water that filled them.

It was one of the worst positions the Battery had yet occupied, although perhaps the Messines Ridge position at its worst almost equalled it. Frequently drivers with pack horses or infantry with pack mules had to take their lives in their hands over the stretch of road at the side of the Battery, and many horrible sights were to be witnessed there.

The telephone wires which the Battery linesmen were responsible for keeping in repair were few and of no great length, but notwithstanding this they were frequently broken and chunks blown out of them by the shell fire. To find the breaks and mend

these wires was no pleasant task in the darkness, perhaps being called out two or three times during the night to restore communication with Group Headquarters. It was dangerous work as well, as in addition to the shelling which seldom ceased, the flooded shell holes six or eight feet deep with sparse foothold on the narrow slippery paths between them, were a source of constant danger in the darkness, as once in, the slimy sides allowed of no getting out without assistance. Several wounded infantrymen in the advances of the previous weeks were drowned in shell holes, no help being at hand at the time.

On the afternoon of the 20th October, an area strafe opening suddenly, Gunner A. E. L. Bissett was making his way up the road to get clear of the bursts round the position, as he thought, and in passing the cookhouse Gunner Cowie called out to him, and not liking to see him alone, ran after him. A few yards further up the road a shell burst immediately in front of them, killing Gunner Bissett, Gunner Cowie narrowly escaping the same fate, but unhurt.

The same day the guns' crews were changed, gunners going up from the wagon lines to take their places.

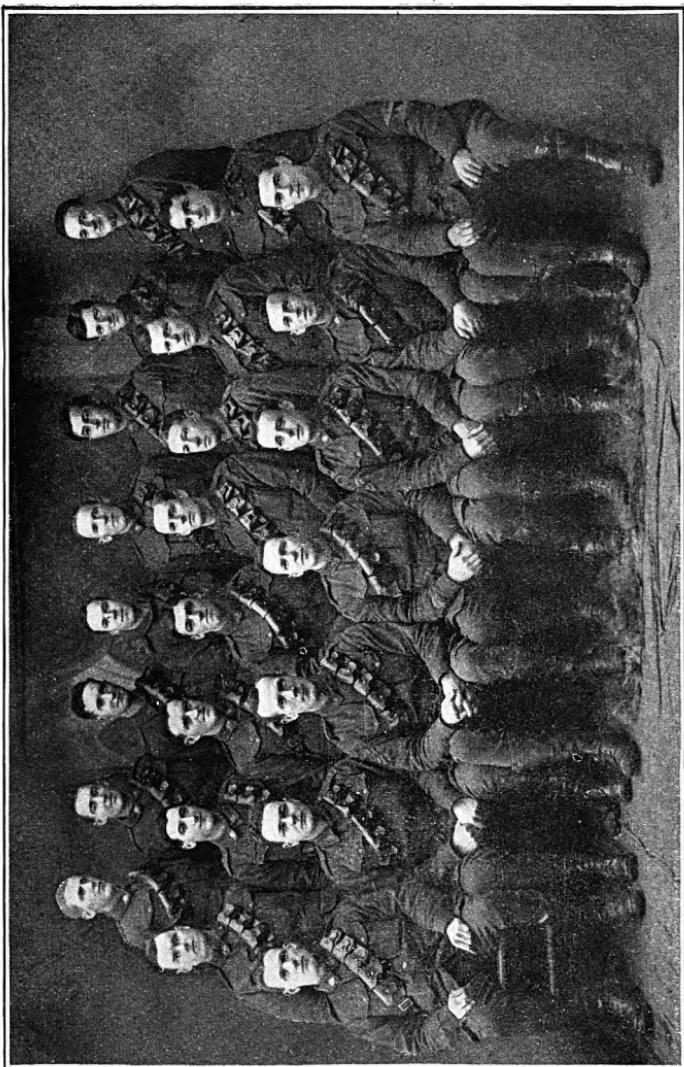
On Monday, the 22nd October, the Battery were relieved by a R.F.A. battery of the 26th Brigade who had been in France since the first fighting commenced in 1914, and considered themselves the luckiest battery in the British Army, up to that time having suffered only twenty casualties killed. Their advance party arrived at the position early that morning and the Battery's gunners put their kits on the G.S. wagon and all got away safely. There was a shortage of a few hundred rounds of ammunition in the Battery's complement, necessitating this quantity being packed from the dump by several drivers on the morning of changing over, in the course of which Driver A. Rogers was killed and several other drivers had narrow escapes. The place where it happened was just below the crest on the main road leading to the Battery and the scene of many other casualties. One of Driver Rogers' horses was killed on the spot, the other being badly wounded, while Driver Evans pair were also badly wounded by the same shell, and the three were evacuated to the Veterinary Station.

On the last morning there was a battery order for all detachments to stand to at 5.30 a.m., information having come through to the effect that the enemy were contemplating attacking at that hour. Several rounds were put over and any attempt was presumably frustrated as the "cease fire" came through shortly afterwards.

Everybody with the exception of a couple of telephonists got clear of the position by eleven o'clock, and shortly after mid-day a heavy barrage was opened on the road and Battery position, and a direct hit was obtained on the sand-bagged dressing station immediately in rear of it. More casualties were also sustained on

*December, 1918.*

**"D" SUB-SECTION.**





the road, and the "Tommy" Battery who took over had a Corporal and two men wounded within an hour of their arrival. All traffic was held up that day for several hours, and it was five o'clock before a lull in the bombardment allowed of the two telephonists of the Battery making a dash up the roadway on their way to the wagon lines. The Battery on several occasions were able to get "reinforcements" of horses to make up for those killed and wounded by the drivers taking back the riderless strays found on the road, and it was seldom that the shelling was too heavy to allow of anything good floating around ownerless without being taken possession of. An officer's hack was marched in on the strength one day, complete with saddle and bridle, and two or three good medium draughts also involuntarily enlisted with the "six-bob-a-day tourists."

For the twenty-six days from 29th September to 24th October, 1917, the total expenditure of ammunition per six batteries was 119,430 rounds, or approximately 20,000 rounds were fired by the 27th Battery during this period.

The transport of this huge quantity of ammunition from the dump to the position devolved upon the drivers of the Battery, giving a good idea of the hard work for which they were responsible.

## THE RETURN TO DRANOUTRE.

The march from Vlamertinghe was commenced about nine o'clock on the morning of the 23rd October, midst surroundings of mud, rain, and wind, and the route taken was by way of Ouderdom, Dickebusch Road, Lindenhoek, and Daylight Corner, reaching the wagon lines at Dranoutre previously occupied by the Battery during the months of July and August, about four o'clock in the afternoon. Since leaving the camp on the last occasion improvements had been effected by the recent occupiers in the way of several Nissen huts and another covered in and bricked stable, which made the lines habitable during the winter months. It was understood at the time that the Battery would be out of action for an indefinite period, being in reserve, and the usual "spell-time" routine of parades, grooming, harness cleaning, and exercising was enforced, and a certain amount of leave was granted to Bailleul.

On the 29th October Major J. M. Irwin temporarily took charge of the Battery.

At this time Bailleul was shelled on several occasions, one round bursting in the canteen and doing a considerable amount of damage there, besides causing several casualties.

On the 4th November advantage was taken of the "rest" and everybody was inoculated.

Late on the night of 8th November orders came through for the Battery to leave the following morning to take over the guns at a position in front of Hill 63 in the Warneton Sector. Reveillé that morning was at 4 a.m., and the gunners left for the position at 8 a.m. mounted. The following day the wagon lines were moved to Le Veau, and not far from previous lines occupied near Nieppe Station.

## SEAFORTH FARM.

This position was taken over from an R.F.A. battery of the 8th Division, and was an open one, situated slightly in advance of Seaforth Farm, and reached by way of Hyde Park Corner, Messines Road, and Ash Avenue. The gun-pits were the usual camouflage ones, and their position had recently been changed further to the left flank, the previous battery having been shelled out of their old pits.

The sector covered by the Battery was Warneton and its environs; one of the most conspicuous points on the front being "Warneton Tower" on the outskirts of the town. This was a round pillar of heavily reinforced concrete, also strongly protected at the base with barbed wire many feet thick, and was used by the enemy as an observation post from which a full view would be obtained of our country as far back as the edge of Ploegsteert Wood, and the ridge along the top of which runs Barricade Avenue. The tower gave considerable annoyance to the infantry, overlooking as it did all the trenches in the immediate neighbourhood. In spite of it being a target and Zero point for many batteries, it seemed to withstand numerous direct hits, the only visible damage to the structure being a few splashes on the concrete where the steel rails showed through. The O.P. used by the twenty-seventh was a cupola covered emplacement, on the edge of one of the mine craters fired at the opening of the Messines stunt, in the previous June. Other points visible from it were the churches in Comines and Wervicq, and on a ridge some four or five miles back from the front line, at a place called Paul Bucq, a certain amount of enemy movement was usually visible on a clear day.

To a great extent the enemy's country was very open, and during the six weeks as many as fifteen different flashes were reported as visible at different points on the sector. How many of these were dummy flashes cannot of course be determined, but many were conclusively proved as enemy guns firing, as the report would be consistently audible.

The gunners at this position had fairly good quarters some short distance away from the guns in old concrete dug-outs in the original Hun front line. A part of the trench had been cleaned out and made habitable, and one or two extra dug-outs had been made to accommodate the necessary number of men.

The Officers' Mess was a concrete dug-out at the top end of the trench, and still bearing a board with the word

"ZUGFUHRER"

painted on it. The literal translation of the word being "leaders"; it probably was the dug-out used by the N.C.O.'s of the battalion.

It was a coincidence that the Battery's present position was at a point in No Man's Land, opposite the Huns' old front line trench which was previously covered by the Battery when at the first K. 3 position in Ploegsteert at the opening of the Messines stunt.

In rear of the trenches used by the Battery to sleep in an infantry duckboard track connected the Messines Road with one of the tracks leading to the front line trenches, and owing to its being distinctly visible from the air it drew a great deal of the enemy's harassing fire, chiefly directed on that area after dark.

On the night of taking over, the Battery were particularly unlucky in sustaining casualties. Two gunners from each sub-section were detailed nightly to sleep in each gun pit for the purpose of doing any shooting necessary during the night.

On the night in question, probably having noticed movement about the position in changing over during the day, the enemy's fire on the area was very heavy. Gunners G. G. Cowie and P. Gardner—it being Gardner's first day at the position, only a short time previously having reverted to the rank of gunner from a driver—were detailed from "D" Sub to sleep in their pit. During the night they were both killed by a most unfortunate chance shell getting a direct hit on the corner of their dug-out.

A few days after moving in the weather turned wet and the pits were flooded out. About twenty-five yards in rear of the guns were two cupola camouflaged dug-outs, the one being used by the Nos. 1 as sleeping quarters, and the other as the control, and these continually required baling out, as also did the gun pits.

On the 15th November the Battery was heavily shelled during the morning, the enemy opening fire about 8 a.m. "E" Sub's dug-out was knocked in, and apart from keeping the men away from the guns while it lasted, no further damage was done. This shelling was carried out sometimes by a battery situated in the neighbourhood of Comines, and sometimes by one in rear of Deulement. It was frequently repeated, but the bulk of the shells fell short, and the paddock immediately in front of the pits was torn up with shell craters. During one of these "days of hate" the O.P. stopped a direct hit, and was put out of action. The "strafing" was more a matter of area shooting than deliberate counter battery-work—the H.E. percussion bursts being accompanied with a number of time H.E. shells. Practically every night from dark until midnight, and sometimes of longer duration, a regular barrage would be put up on the duckboard track to the rear of the billets, and especially so on nights when the infantry in the line were changing over. It was on one of these nightly "stunts" that the cookhouse was "stonkered" by a 4.2in., but fortunately no one was in it at the time and "no damage of military importance was done" other than a few holes punched in the cooks' dixies. On a later occasion "F" Sub's dug-out, within a few feet of this cookhouse, withstood a glancing direct hit from a similar shell, and the occupants at the time are distinctly fortunate that no further comment here is necessary.

While in action at this position, Mr. E. J. Pope came into the Battery, and on the 15th November Major Iwin left and became O.C. of the 25th Battery of the 7th Brigade. The following day Mr. Nurse transferred to the 107th Howitzer Battery and Captain G. V. Moriarty became Battery Captain.

On the 30th November a raid was carried out by the infantry of the 10th Brigade on trenches immediately in front of Warneton Tower, which was a success. The raid was mainly for information purposes—a considerable amount of activity having been noticed behind the Hun lines, and it being considered a likely part of the line for the much advertised great German offensive to start at. Precautions were being taken, and in the event of an enemy attack a great deal of new defensive wire would have to be contended with. Machine gunners were also in reserve for emergencies a few hundred yards in front of the Battery.

On the night of the 2nd December the control was within an ace of being blown in, a shell bursting at the side of it and dislodging the cupola covering.

December 5th was another day of constant shelling, and by this time the ground round the pits was only a succession of shell holes and loose earth, the wonder being that more casualties to men or damage to the guns were not sustained.

There is a good deal of humour to be extracted, even from incidents that occur on a day when the Battery is being heavily shelled with death-dealing 5.9in. shells raining all over the position, although probably the humorous side is not noticeable until afterwards. This morning in particular opened quietly, with good observation and winter sunshine, and Captain Rourke decided upon going forward to the support trenches to range the guns on special targets. A signaller accompanied him, armed with a Lucas daylight signal lamp, and communication was to be by way of the Battery O.P., where the flashes would be read but not acknowledged, the O.P. being in full view of the enemy. The orders would then be transmitted over the 'phone to the control in rear of the guns, and from there to each individual gun by megaphone.

The lamp commenced winking away, and letter by letter. "No. 1 stand to" was deciphered—in the meantime the day's strafe had commenced and shells were bursting in every direction all round the position. The order was duly passed over the 'phone to the control, and the telephonist putting his head outside the dug-out door, and his mouth to the megaphone, yelled out: "No. 1 stand to!" This had to be repeated once or twice before "No. 1" deigned to hear, and, when they did, the acknowledgement, between the bursts and flying dirt, was a firm but emphatic "Go-and-get—work!"

It was fortunate the lamp was sending D.D. messages.

On the 10th December a daylight bombing raid was carried out by about a dozen enemy machines, and bombs were dropped in the vicinity of the wagon lines, and the 25th Battery had several men and horses wounded. On the following day "A" Sub's gun pit was blown in by shell fire, but no one was hurt.

On the 12th December General Birdwood inspected the Battery in detail, and had a cheery word for everybody. Just previous to this date, owing to the constant shelling, the centre section of the Battery was detached to pits, renovated and rebuilt by working parties consisting of gunners from the Battery. This detached position was on the other side of Ash Avenue, and immediately in front of Antoines Farm, in our old front line trench, and for the remaining weeks in this position those guns were not seriously engaged by enemy fire. During the night the usual area strafing by enemy batteries was occasionally in their vicinity, and although one or two hits were obtained on the road running alongside no advantage was gained by the enemy through this nightly expenditure of ammunition.

At a later date two other guns, "A" and "B" Sub's, were detached to new pits in the rear, and to the right of the old position, and nearer the metal roadway. The Battery took part in many duty shoots while covering this sector, mainly for the purpose of putting up a harassing fire on the enemy's communications, and the firing was carried out at intervals during the day and night.

A second daylight bombing raid was attempted by hostile machines with less success, as one of the Gothas was brought down when returning by two of our planes, and fell in the enemy's lines in front of Deûlement, the unexpended bombs exploding in a cloud of smoke as the machine struck the earth. The Gotha's downward course was preceded by a small black object turning over and over on its headlong flight—one of the crew who had jumped or fallen out of the doomed machine.

The Lewis gun salved at the Zonnebeke position was mounted on a post outside the Officers' Mess, and was used occasionally when enemy aircraft presented an opportunity.

On the 13th December a light fall of snow covered the ground and everywhere was frozen hard—vastly increasing the danger zone of splinters from bursting shells.

On the 21st December the Battery was relieved by the 15th Battery of the 2nd Australian Division; the guns being handed over in the pits. During that afternoon the area in rear of the Battery was subjected to considerable shelling, many falling on the Messines Road, leading up to Hyde Park Corner. Driver Edwards, R.J., with the Mess. cart, on his way to the Battery to pick up a load of gear to take back to the wagon lines, was just in time to pick up a gunner of the relieving Battery who was wounded by one of these shells on the Messines Road. The man was rather badly wounded, but Driver Edwards got him down to the dressing station at the gallop, and then returned to the old Battery position, and got safely away once again with his load.

The following day, the 22nd December, the advance party moved from the Le Veau wagon lines to carry out the preliminaries to taking over a position at Chapelle D'Armentières. The same day the lines were moved to covered stables at Le Mortier in the neighbourhood of Croix du Bec, and at 4 p.m. the left section went into action, the other two sections following the next evening.

## CHAPELLE D'ARMENTIERES.

On arriving at this position it was a surprise to find that the one to be taken over was the same as that occupied by the Battery in the month of March previously. The brick kiln had been considerably battered in the meantime, and the pits which had formerly housed the guns were now no longer in commission.

New pits had been arranged in houses on the other side of the road, and the intervals between the guns were considerable. Adjoining most of the pits good dug-outs for the accommodation of the detachments had been arranged by the R.F.A. Battery of the 57th Division from whom the 27th took over.

The right section's guns were about 300 yards in advance of the brick kiln, but in houses on the opposite side of the main road. Further in rear and in the same line of houses "C." Sub's gun was in a pit at the back of an old château previously occupied by the Mayor of Chapelle d'Armentières. The story concerning the Mayor has it that he was shot in this house, in the early days of the war, as a spy for imparting military information to the enemy.

Opposite the brick kiln, and spread out among houses further up the road, were D. E. and F. Subs.' pits. In the kiln itself the Officers' Mess was at the rear as formerly—alongside which was the control, having been moved from the other side, shell fire having destroyed the greater part of the building there. The roof had also been considerably knocked about and the high chimney at the far end of the building was no longer standing, although this was destroyed intentionally so that the kiln would not be so conspicuous, as it was considered that enemy batteries were using it as a zero point.

The Battery's sector while in this position was considerably more to the left of the Mez Macquart sector covered by them on their previous occupation of this position, and the zero point used was La Hongrie Farm. The trenches on which the Battery had to be prepared to shoot reached practically from Locality One to Locality Ten, almost as far on the left as Pont Ballot. On two or three occasions a single gun was taken forward before daylight to shoot on special targets, and for these, O.P.'s other than the Battery one at "Edinboro' Castle" were used—"Glenfield," "Mosquito Palace," and the Ferme du Biez being used on different occasions.

Christmas puddings were on issue for Christmas Day, and the day being a quiet one, everything went off well. New Year's Day was kept up in a similar manner, and the detachments all managed to have a good time under the circumstances.

Preparations were in progress here also in case of an attack on a large scale by the enemy, and infantry wiring parties were working nightly in front and in rear of the position putting up additional belts of barbed wire defences. At night an S.O.S.

guard was always posted on the upper storey of one of the houses on the look-out for rockets on the Battery's sector.

No S.O.S. came through while the Battery was in this position and not a great deal of artillery fire was carried out on either side. The day the Battery took over, the position and the vicinity were heavily shelled with 4.2's and some 5.9's and occasionally during the daytime an enemy battery endeavoured to find one or other of the gun pits, some of the shells getting close to C. and D. Sub's guns, but no damage was done. After dark, also, 4.2's and gas shells were often put over on the road, and houses on either side of it, but on the whole the position was a very quiet one.

Edinboro' Castle O.P. also had a square steel framework with its base on the ground floor of the building, with a covered top—shrapnel proof—on the fifth floor. An iron ladder led down the inside of the structure for use in case of emergency. The visibility was not good at this time of the year, and little was to be seen owing to the frequent ground mist during the day-time.

The enemy seemed very anxious to keep our patrolling planes and scouts well back from the line, as they were frequently engaged by his anti-aircraft batteries when well over the buildings in Houplines and a considerable distance behind even our own front line trenches.

A great deal of ammunition was not required at this time, but the drivers had to use pack horses for taking forward a sufficient number of rounds for use on the occasions when a gun went forward for special shoots.

A serious accident might have happened on "D" Sub's gun while in one of these advanced positions, the breach ring attached to the rear end of the buffer splitting, and had it not been noticed in time the next round fired would probably have caused an accident, there being nothing to overcome the recoil. This necessitated the gun being out of action for the rest of the day. For the detachment this was probably a blessing in disguise, as the atmosphere cleared considerably during the morning, and the mist dispersed, and their position—immediately behind the subsidiary trenches—would hardly have escaped the notice of enemy observers.

On the 4th and 5th January the Battery was relieved by an R.F.A. Battery, the guns being handed over in the pits, and on the following day the wagon lines were moved to Steente-je—a small village of about a dozen houses and a church, some three kilometres from Bailleul, where the battery remained in reserve.

It was at this time that "Blighty" leave commenced in the Battery, the allotment being seven men per week, it being the first anniversary of the 27th Battery's arrival in France.

The names had been previously drawn and a leave roster was in full swing, every man in the Battery knowing when his turn was to come.

## STEENTE-JE.

The day of moving was a very cold one, and the roads having a very slippery surface, it was as much as the horses could do to keep their feet, although most of them had been fitted with frost nails.

On arriving there, it was found that the stables were covered ones, but there was no brick flooring. The Rt. Sec. billets were the usual straw-strewn barn accommodation, warm enough to sleep in, but, being also used by the local poultry, usually contained a good deal more than warmth alone, and a frequent bath and clean change were a necessity.

The other billet occupied by the left and centre sections was the upper storey of one of the farm buildings, a double tier of wire beds running down both sides of the narrow loft.

For the greater part of the twenty-five days spent at Steente-je the weather was either very cold, with snow, or wet. For a couple of days the roads around the stables were flooded, the water being unable to get away in the ditches at the side of the roads quickly enough.

Gunlayers' tests and gun drill were carried out, and the usual exercising of horses, grooming, and harness cleaning filled the rest of the daylight.

The Brigade Y.M.C.A. tent was erected next to the stables, and a big marquee for concerts, etc., was also put up close to the billets.

A boxing contest was arranged amongst the men of the Battery, and some good bouts were witnessed. A fair-sized ring had been fixed up and the preliminaries were run off the first night, the finals being completed a couple of nights later. Driver Pat Kennedy acted as referee, and on the first evening gave an exhibition bout with one of the 3rd Division signallers.

Gunner Kilby and Driver Hitchcock were the finalists for the lightweights, and Bombardier C. C. Brown—a fairly recently promoted driver—and Driver Hodgens put up a good bout in the heavyweights, the latter being one of the Battery cooks. The referee, in introducing them, addressed them as "Driver Brown" and "Poisoner Hodgens," evidently having in mind some of his recent deadly work with the dixies. On it being pointed out by an officer that *Driver* Brown was a Bombardier, he replied: "Oh, it's all the same, sir—it's only a driver with his brains out!" The decisions were in favour of Gunners Kilby and Hodgens respectively.

The bout of the evening was provided by a couple of youngsters about ten or twelve years old from the neighbouring farm, who, after a lot of persuasion, put the gloves on. The rounds were distinctly unscientific and caused a lot of amusement. A collection was taken up afterwards for the young froggies which yielded about twelve francs, mostly in coppers, and quite a good performance by the audience for a couple of days before pay day. When the bigger boy saw there was money in the game he was most anxious to give an encore. His muscles swelled visibly, and it was as much as the referee could do to keep him from getting at the smaller boy as he sat in his corner. For another couple of francs he would willingly have killed the little one, without a doubt!

Concerts were given on three occasions by the Steenwerck Anti-Aircraft Concert Party, and also the "Anzac Coves."

Lieut.-Colonel H. D. K. Macartney, before leaving on the 8th January for a staff appointment at Corps Headquarters visited the Battery and spoke a few words of farewell to N.C.O.'s and men representing the different sub-sections.

Lieut.-Colonel W. Churchus took over the command of the Brigade.

On the 30th January, 1918, the Right Section left in motor lorries to go into action once again, and they were followed the next day by the other two sections of the battery. The same day the wagon lines at Le Veau were re-occupied by the Battery's horses.

## HILL 63.

*January 30, 1918, to March 11, 1918.*

The 27th Battery here relieved the 15th Battery of the 5th Brigade, 2nd Australian Division, and the guns were handed over in their pits. The actual situation of the position was on the top of Hill 63 (U.13 c8925), the sector covered being the same as when the Battery was in front of Hill 63 near the River Douve in the month of December, 1917. Warneton Tower was used as a zero point, the Battery O.P. being at St. Yves and close to the Eastern end of Ploegsteert Wood. The Brigade O.P. was in Heath Trench and slightly forward of the Battery position. For the greater part of the time the visibility was indifferent, but on clear days enemy movement behind the lines was engaged by the guns. On all days permitting of visibility, aerial activity on both sides was considerable, it still being considered highly probable that this sector and those adjacent would be chosen by the enemy when the time was ripe for opening his offensive. On this account rifles were kept in all gun pits, in addition to which a Lewis gun with ammunition was issued to the Battery for use against enemy planes as well as against advancing troops, should that occur.

Shoots during the night were frequently carried out on different targets. Two "Minnie" positions known as "Matilda" and "Lizzie" received, among others, the Battery's attentions.

On the 3rd February the Royal Aust. Art. 8in. Battery at the foot of the hill near Hyde Park Corner was shelled and sustained casualties.

On the 7th February, from about 10 o'clock in the morning until 1 p.m., about seventy rounds were fired on enemy working parties, and from 1.45 p.m. until 5 p.m. that afternoon about 200 rounds of 7.7cm. shells in half hourly bursts of fire fell on and around the position.

A. and C. Sub.'s guns were put out of action and had to be taken to ordnance, from whence they returned a couple of days later. All telephone lines of communication were broken for the time being, and the drivers who at that time happened to be taking ammunition to the pits with pack horses had some narrow escapes. Driver McKane's horse was slightly wounded.

Five men from the Battery were engaged daily on building pits in front of Hill 63 for the guns of a mobile battery, additional batteries pulling in specially for an infantry raid to take place on 10th February.

Zero time for the opening of the barrage was 10 p.m. on "Z" day, 10th February, the raiders consisting of men of the 10th Infantry Brigade, 3rd Division, and a diversion in the way of a Chinese attack was made at a point north of the road in U.11d, the raid lasting 45 minutes. The 3rd Divisional Artillery were reinforced by the 6th Army Brigade, and the assistance of

Corps Heavy Artillery was also given in counter battery fire during the raid.

From 10 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. and 2 to 3.30 p.m. on "Y" day, the 9th February, the batteries were engaged in a bombardment of the Warnton Trench System and the town of Warnton in the area bounded by the River Douve on the north and east, and the River Lys on the south. The rate of fire was 75 rounds H.E. and 25 rounds of shrapnel per battery per hour.

The 27th Battery's share in the barrage during the raid consisted of firing a total of 636 rounds in the forty-five minutes allotted for the "hop over" and return.

After the raid was over—on the morning of 11th February—at 3.0 a.m. and 3.45 a.m., in conjunction with other 18-pounders and 4.5 howitzers, the Battery fired a further 48 rounds in bursts of one minutes' fire of four rounds per gun.

The results of the raid were highly successful. Thirty enemy dead who had endeavoured to avoid the barrage were found in No Man's Land. The raiders on the right met with strong opposition, and they killed fifteen Germans with their bayonets and accounted for eighteen others. The left party met with no opposition in the front line trench, but were strongly opposed from dug-outs in the support trench. Three dug-outs there were bombed, and that accounted for approximately a further twenty-five of the enemy. All the Huns in the trenches had their gas masks adjusted, the smoke shells evidently misleading them. Three machine guns and a Pineapple Thrower were captured. Twelve prisoners on their way across No Man's Land attempted to escape and were all killed. The prisoners brought in numbered thirty-three.

The infantry also reported that the enemy trenches were badly damaged by artillery fire and the barrage put up was also reported as admirable. The casualties in the infantry were two officers missing, three wounded, six other ranks killed, and twenty-four wounded—twelve of whom were very slightly so.

On the 16th February Gunner M. Linnane was wounded in the arm—for the fourth occasion—by an enemy shell dropping short and bursting close to the Officers' Mess. He seemed to have some magnetic attraction for splinters of shells, having only returned from "Blighty" after his previous wound little more than a week, and he was the only casualty the Battery sustained during the six weeks in this position. On this occasion he also got to England to hospital for treatment.

On the same day "E" Sub.'s gun went forward as an anti-tank gun to a position on top of the crest in front of Hill 63 and adjacent to the forward end of Ploegsteert Wood. Mr. Pope was in charge and Sergeant Barclay was the No. 1. It was a very wet night, and after getting the gun to the bottom of Hill 63 it was dismounted and loaded on two trucks and pushed along a light railway line running through the wood. From the nearest point on the line to its destination it had to be again unloaded and carried forward, but, owing to the numerous shell holes and

the slippery state of the ground, difficulties were met with. However, the Army has at its disposal everything essential to success, and on this occasion a rum issue was brought to light and the heavy parts were carried the remainder of the distance without a hitch. That night Gunner Turnbull, in the course of one of his many orations, addressed to anybody near at hand who would listen, was heard to say that the three most necessary articles for the Army were "bully beef," tobacco, and rum, as an Army moves on its stomach, holds the line on tobacco, and advanced on rum!

At this time the offensive by the enemy was expected on several occasions, and from the statements of prisoners a short bombardment with H.E. and gas early in the morning was the likely programme. Consequently, the Battery had orders to "stand to" from 3 a.m. onwards for several mornings. The Pioneers were on salvage work carting away everything movable and likely to be of the slightest value to the enemy.

On the night of February 26 the battery wagons conveyed about 800 rounds of ammunition to the bottom of the hill, which was "packed" by fifty pack-horses to the gun pits the following night. A couple of days later the heavy batteries did some particularly good work in silencing the enemy's batteries. The same day Mr. Lloyd George paid a visit to the neighbourhood, the English newspapers at the time reporting that he was "indisposed in the country."

On March 1 General Birdwood paid an unadvertised visit to the battery position, and some of the men were nearly caught without their white lanyards on, these being the latest innovation in the battery, and the cause of a considerable amount of jealousy among the other batteries in the brigade!

A further raid was planned to take place on the night of March 3, to be repeated the following night, March 4. Preparatory wire cutting was carried out by the 4.5-inch Howitzer covered by a bombardment of the whole area, particular care being taken that the wire cutting was not noticeable to the enemy, and not more than fifty rounds per day were fired on the particular part of the wire where the gap had to be made to allow of the raiders' entry into the enemy trenches. Combined gas and smoke shoots were also carried out to mislead the enemy.

During the wire-cutting process by the howitzers our F.L. trenches were always cleared of infantry to avoid accidents, a code word being arranged with the battery concerned for the regarrisoning of the trenches when completed.

The 9th Infantry Brigade supplied the 300 men to take part in the raid, and the points of entry and objective were the same as the previous one on February 10. The raids on both nights were to be of fifty minutes' duration, and no No. 106 instantaneous fuses were to be used by the batteries except for the last five minutes of each raid.

The total number of rounds fired by the battery during the raid was 718, and the results were a success.

On the following night, March 4, the trenches raided were between U12c0020 and U12c3337, U18a2855 and U18a7085, and penetrated along the communication trench to U12c7505. The division on the left raided simultaneously, also the 11th Brigade on their front. On this occasion, also, counter-battery work was carried out by the heavies.

Zero time was 12.50 a.m., and the duration of the raid was fifty minutes, the same as the previous night.

The results of this raid were not as successful as previous nights, the raiding party being enfiladed on their way over, and, owing to being partially surrounded, were forced to fight their way back to our own lines.

At this time the rates of fire in answer to an S.O.S. call from the infantry were:—

3 r.p.g. p.m. for the 1st five minutes.
2 " " " 2nd "
1 " " " 3rd "

and the firing would cease, unless still required, in which case it would be repeated. Four hundred rounds per gun was the minimum amount of ammunition to be maintained at the position from that date.

The "Warneton Tower" constructed of reinforced concrete only a short distance behind the enemy lines and the target of many heavy batteries on a number of occasions, was still a source of trouble to the infantry in the trenches, which it overlooked to a very considerable depth. On March 7, at 2.20 p.m., a 15-inch gun fired four rounds at the tower, practically levelling it with the ground at the fourth shot, so removing a landmark and a most undesirable point of vantage for enemy observers of all movement in our lines.

On March 8 there was great activity everywhere on both sides, and the following morning an enemy attack in the Le Bizet sector was broken up.

From January 31 onwards the wagon lines remained at "Rawal Pindi" lines at Le Veau, and many improvements were carried out on the roads and stables in this camp.

On February 25, somewhat belated, but nevertheless just as acceptable, the comforts from the "League of Loyal Women of S.A." arrived and were distributed. Although intended for Christmas—the letters enclosed were despatched about July, 1917—the contents of the boxes were greatly appreciated by everybody.

On March 11, 1918, the right section of the battery handed over to a 2nd Division battery, and the following day the wagon lines moved to covered stables near the village of Sec Bois, in the neighbourhood of Strazaele, the road taken being through Bailleul and Vieux Berquin. The end of the column had only just passed through Bailleul when several rounds fired by a gun of heavy calibre lobbed in the centre of the town, making the red brick dust from the old houses rise high in the air. During the afternoon the other two sections travelled by motor transport direct from Hill 63 to the new wagon lines, where the battery were to be in reserve for the next few weeks.

## THE SPELL AT SEC BOIS.

*March 12, 1918, to March 23, 1918.*

The billets here were very scattered, the cook-house, Q.M. Store and left section being a considerable distance from the horse lines and other farmhouse billets, entailing a walk of at least a quarter of a mile to the cookhouse for meals. Opposite the stables there was one estaminet, and along one side of the main road were a few small farmhouses, and apart from the village of Sec Bois—distant about half a mile—the place was a kind of No Man's Land for anything but work and fresh air. Fortunately, during the battery's stay there the weather was typical of early spring, and for the most part fine and warm during the day.

The usual "spell" routine was carried out daily. Reveillé was at 6 a.m. and the men were dismissed about 5.15 p.m., the day being occupied in grooming, exercising, and harness-cleaning parades, the whole being commonly referred to in gunners' parlance as "beeresses," presumably taken from the initial letters of the words "brilliant shine." In addition, there was a Brigade Signalling School for the battery staff, and gunners were exercised in gun-laying.

During the first few days the Divisional Concert Party, the "Cooees" gave nightly performances in the village, which were greatly patronised by the men from the batteries.

The Seventh Brigade Y.M.C.A. was also established in the village, and, in addition, further recreation was obtained in practice games of cricket during the evenings. Arrangements were also being made for brigade sports and inter-battery matches. The percentage of men on "Blighty" leave was greatly increased, while the battery was stationed there in reserve, as many as three men a day going on leave to England for fourteen days.

It was on Saturday, March 23, that the blow fell. It had been proclaimed a half holiday, and a percentage of local leave passes had already been issued, some of the owners actually being on their way up the road, when a despatch came in from Headquarters giving orders for the battery to move off at 4 p.m. It was then 2 o'clock, which meant that everyone would have to go for his life to pack up and be ready at the appointed hour.

Two guns were at ordnance, which at that time was situated at Neuve Eglise, many kilometres away, and a special mounted orderly had to be despatched to hurry them back at once. They arrived later and had to follow the main column, which had already left to time. The three men who had proceeded on leave that morning got as far as Strazeele Station, and were turned back. Others who had left Sec Bois a few days previous to March 23, some of them actually getting as far as the cross-channel boat, were also roped in

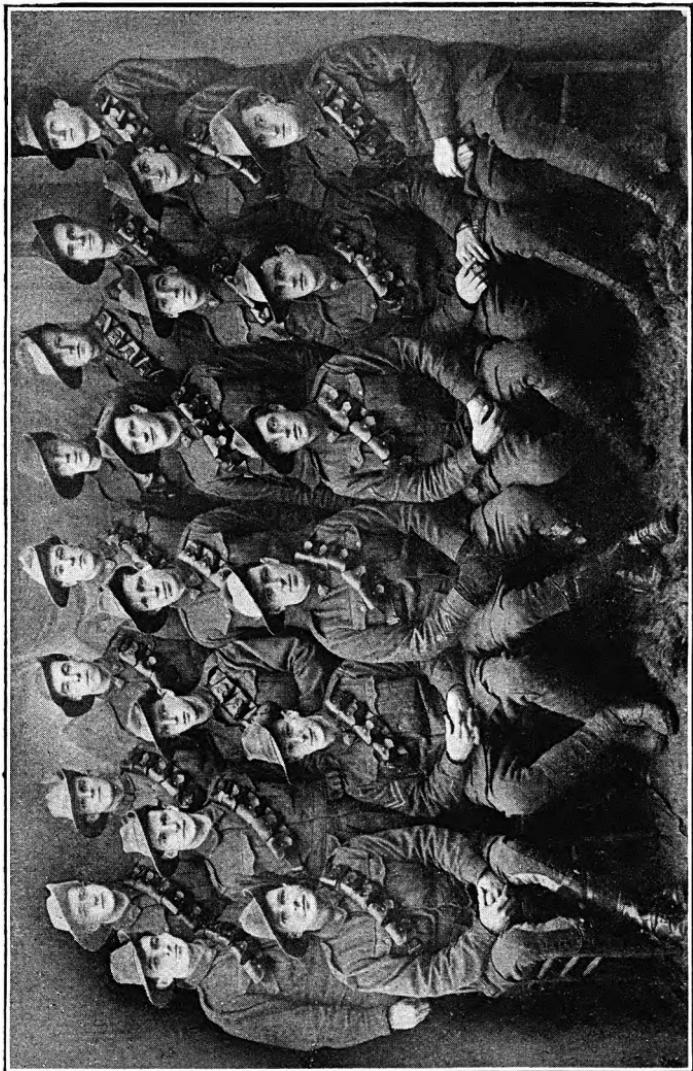
and returned to their unit. The battery being on the march, a number of them spent many days floating around the country looking for them, and others were kept in leave camps at Calais for several days.

Rumours had been persistent for a day or two previous that the Huns' big offensive had opened, but no actual details were to hand at the time. A move, in fact, was half anticipated, but by no means hoped for, the Ypres sector being mentioned as a likely destination. In the neighbourhood of Sec Bois enemy shelling could be seen and heard in the distance, Hazebrouck, Merris, Meteren, and Neuf Berquin each receiving their share of the hostile artillery, while heavy bombardments night and morning could be heard in the direction of La Bassée. Bailleul, the largest town in the neighbourhood, had been evacuated for some days—the clock tower on the Hotel de Ville having crashed into the market place, being hit by one of the earliest enemy shells in the bombardment. The contents of the shop windows, which all the men knew so well, were scattered across the narrow streets. Bailleul, a kind of a home of the battery around which they had circled in their many different positions during the previous year, was already taking on the appearance of deserted brick dust and mortar, with only the inevitable cat or dog prowling round among the débris.

After strenuous work the column moved off at four o'clock. Motor lorries were attached to the batteries for transport, and a party was left behind to clear up the lines. About 8 o'clock that evening, when they had finished and the lorry was loaded to the roof, and those of the rear party who were not mounted, consisting of gunners and a few spare parts, had climbed on to the back of the lorry and were hanging on to the very limited accommodation the heavily loaded wagon afforded, the engine was started, and away they went. In navigating the first corner, about twenty yards away, the tired onlookers had the sickening sensation of seeing the near-side wheels sinking their own depth in the soft ground at the roadside and the vehicle come to a standstill. The intervening hours of work need not be detailed, it being sufficient to mention that the lorry arrived with its load at its destination, about 10 kilometres from there, as dawn was breaking the next morning!

*December, 1918.*

**"E" SUB-SECTION.**





## ON THE ROAD TO THE SOMME.

*March 23, 1918, to March 27, 1918.*

The stopping-place for the first night on leaving Sec Bois was in the Morbecque area, and, via La Motte au Bois, was a distance of about 10 kilos. The previous occasion the battery had visited Morbecque was in September, 1917, on the return march from the short spell at Fauquembergues en route for Ypres. The paddock and farmhouse billets occupied on this occasion were not far distant from the previous lines. Although nothing definite was known, it was generally and correctly surmised that the final destination would be somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Somme battleground, which was by this time known to be the scene of the enemy's first offensive. So everyone made up his mind that "Boolecourt" was the objective, and, at any rate, it was a relief to know that the "Ypres Furphy" was incorrect. It was thought probable, however, that the battery would entrain at Morbecque, but this was evidently not practicable, and it was soon realised that a forced march with heavy fighting at the end was more likely.

All surplus gear had to be rigidly cut down, no motor lorry accompanying the column on the second and following days. One of the battery's G.S. wagons (the one salved from the Zonnebeke Road) had to be abandoned there, badly needing repairs, and two lame horses also had to be left to be picked up by the Veterinary Corps of the area. Kits had to be gone over, and all unnecessary articles had to be dumped—in this connection the canteen, which had at this time a large stock in hand, was compelled to leave a great portion of its stores behind. At a later date, and in the light of subsequent events, it is possible Fritz and his hungry hordes may have enjoyed some of these luxuries at the battery's expense!

The move off from Morbecque on the second day was made at 1.30 p.m., a distance of 15 kilos. having to be covered to Witternesse, the stopping-place for the night. The road was by way of Steenbecque, Boeseghem, and Aire, and nothing of particular interest was noticeable on the march, with the exception of a number of men of the Chinese Labour Contingent, who were having a moving day also.

The battery arrived at the village in the late afternoon, the horse lines being fixed up in a side street alongside a stream which ran through the village. The billets for the men were scattered down the main street, and the battery's arrival caused a moderate amount of excitement to the villagers having their Sunday evening promenade in the one and only main street.

The following morning, March 25, *réveillé* was at 4 a.m., but fortunately the trumpeter was one of those on leave, or the whole village might have suffered. As it was, the Orderly Sergeant was

responsible for breaking the news to the slumbering troops, and as he had not an intimate knowledge of all the billets, some of them missed his kindly attention, which, naturally, the men greatly regretted.

Before moving off at 9 a.m., the battery canteen, which had managed to struggle this length of the journey, was wound up, and a final dividend was declared, each sub-section getting a "sandbag full of something to eat," which, for one day only, considerably assisted the daily ration, which was anything but liberal at that time.

The canteen, from its inception at Dickebusch, when it consisted of a bell tent, a couple of empty soap boxes, "no change and no biscuits," had grown in the six months to a first-class dry canteen, with almost everything that could be asked for obtainable, and it had been of great service to both drivers and gunners.

The day's march totalled 25 kilos., and on the road the towns of St. Hilaire, Ferfay (which town was a fact, and not as its name indicated), and Pernes were passed. The destination, Valhuon, was reached about four o'clock in the afternoon.

The brigade horse lines there were fixed up for the night on the much-worn grass between the trees in the centre of an open square in the village. The battery's billets were on the three sides of the square, accommodation being strictly limited. After watering, grooming, and feeding horses, and half an hour on the harness, the men were dismissed for a hot meal.

Gunner A. Gardiner, when jumping off one of the wagons, tripped and fell, a wheel running over his ankle, causing injuries which necessitated his removal to hospital and from there to Blighty.

The next morning, Tuesday, March 26, *reveillé* was at the same early hour of 4 a.m., the day's march starting at 9.45 a.m. Six kilos. out, St. Pol was the first town of any size to be passed, and the damage done by bombs was noticeable, a private house next to the Hotel de Ville being completely wrecked. On the outskirts of the town bomb holes were in profusion, showing where "Jerry had dropped his bundle" wide of the mark.

One solitary "W.A.A.C." was passed here—the first many of the men had seen, and with her peaked cap and general "racy" appearance two "looks" were necessary to make sure the first impression was not an incorrect one.

The length of the daily marches was increasing, and the country being passed through had changed from the dead level of the north to the hills and valleys of further south, and the steep grades of many of the hills to be surmounted made heavy work for the teams. The weather remained good, although at times cold, and it was a relief to walk occasionally to restore the circulation.

Between St. Pol and Doullens, 27 kilos. further on, the first signs were visible of the movement of troops and preparations for emergencies consequent upon the offensive on a front of fifty miles which the enemy had commenced on March 21—five days previously.

The training ground of Canadian Infantry, where some battalions were evidently resting, was passed during the morning, and there the first news of the 75-mile gun shelling Paris was heard. It was stated that the highest point of the shell's trajectory was thirty-five miles, which called forth the remark that some of the angels would be getting "Blighties" out of it unless they were careful!

In many places lined up at the roadside were hundreds of motor-buses, all ready to move at a moment's notice should they be required.

Some Australian Pioneers and Infantry passed the column during the morning in motor lorries, and before reaching the steep hill leading down into Doullens, where continual halts were necessary owing to the congestion of the traffic at the cross roads, in the centre of the town, everything travelling on the roads seemed to be going in the opposite direction and away from the line. It gave the impression that the 3rd Div. Artillery were going to stop the Hun's rush entirely on their own, and all Tommies spoken to during a halt seemed to be firmly convinced that "Jerry was comin'." Four ammunition wagons—two with four-horse teams—and in rear officers' horses being led by the grooms, a sergeant being in charge of the party, were particularly noticeable, and it appeared they were all that were left of an eighteen-pounder battery. Things looked decidedly cheerful!

Doullens itself was all activity, being the point where the road to Arras branched to the left, the road to Amiens and points along the Somme continuing southwards. The railway station was a busy scene, and the streets were thronged with transports of every description. The general impression made upon those passing through this town was that Hun tin hats might appear at any moment, it being in the immediate vicinity of the line, and likely to be engulfed by the oncoming rush, but in reality the nearest point would be at least 35 kilometres distant.

Towards evening a very long steep hill was encountered outside Doullens by the Arras Road, and orders were passed back along the column for gunners to take every opportunity of watering the team horses at the periodical halts, as the march might be prolonged right through the night, and water would probably be difficult to obtain.

After about a 30-minutes' halt on this hill, occasioned by infantry and transport ahead of the column at the summit, it being a moonlight night, the proceedings were enlivened by a few odd bombs being dropped by enemy planes, evidently intended for the traffic on the road, but the nearest of these was about fifty yards to one side.

As far as Mondicourt the march was continued along the main Arras Road for about 8 kilos., but there the column turned off to the left along a side road to Coullement, the stopping-place for the night, and about 4 kilos. further on. It was a prettily situated village at the top of a wooded ridge. In the valley below, another village, by name Humbercourt, ran alongside a small stream.

During the day, while on the road, a report was received concerning a man dressed as a Brigadier-General, who had been giving unauthorised orders to guns and troops to withdraw, and probably an enemy agent. There being a possibility of a hurried order to move on at any moment during the night, arrangements were made to cover this contingency. It was the practice during the march for the harness belonging to the respective teams to be thrown over their wagons so as to save time in hooking in should an emergency arise.

That night a specially watchful guard was posted on the guns with orders to arrest any passers-by, in uniform or otherwise, and four Tommies were arrested that night, but were allowed to proceed in the morning after furnishing proof of their identity.

That day was the longest march of the trip, 45 kilometres being the total, and by the time the horses were watered and fed and the lines fixed up it was well past midnight, and after what seemed to most of them a few minutes' sleep they turned out at 7 a.m. the next morning to get ready for the last day's trek.

At 9.45 on the morning of Wednesday, March 27, the column again moved out, and retracing the road through Humbercourt as far as Mondicourt, the Arras Road was crossed. Once again the brigade headed practically due south. The first village to be passed was Pas-en-Artois, and during the morning more signs of the "withdrawal" were apparent. Traffic was still heavy on the roads, and between Pas and Thiévres the remnants of Scottish battalions were passed on their way out of the line. Heavy guns were also being moved to new positions further back, and transport of all kinds, including motor-ambulances and Flying Corps lorries, making for safer places, whirled past on the dusty road covering everything with a white powder, the men on the back of the lorries with their grey faces looking more like workmen in a flour mill than soldiers.

The next town, 14 kilometres out, was Marieux, the crossing point on the Doullens-Albert Road, and it was now being used as the centre for various headquarters, "Divvy Sigs" running out aerial telephone lines through the streets at the time the battery were passing through.

The route followed to beyond Puchevillers was by way of the Amiens Road. Resting at the roadside in the village of Puchevillers were two or three companies of French native troops—Senegalese, wearing their picturesque uniforms of red pants and blue tunics.

A few kilometres beyond Puchevillers, the column branched to the left, leaving the Amiens Road, making for Hérissart. Between there and Montigny the column was met by the advance guides, and after watering horses in the latter village in a stream named "L'Halleau," the battery eventually arrived, men and horses, tired, dusty, and hungry, at Behencourt.

Pulling into a paddock on the south side of village, the battery formed up in column of sub-sections, and after unhooking and dropping the poles, the horses, still harnessed up, were fed where they

stood. Cold bully and biscuits were again produced, and in half an hour or so hot tea was ready.

During that day the column covered 41 kilometres to the halting place at Behencourt, and the gun team and Firing Battery wagons had a further 6 kilometres to travel before the position that the battery was to take up was reached.

Out of the 100 hours—from the start from Sec Bois to arriving at Behencourt—the total time actually spent on trek, including roadside halts, was thirty-eight hours, and in this time 136 kilometres or 85 miles were covered, the average speed of travelling working out at 3.5 kilometres per hour, it being considered a creditable performance for field artillery.

During the afternoon the O.C. of the battery, Captain Rourke, went ahead of the column to attend a conference of battery commanders at the village of Franvillers, and at which a position for the guns was then selected. On Captain Rourke's return to the battery, and while horses and men were having a short rest preparatory to taking up the guns, which had to be in position and ready for action before midnight, he addressed a few words to the N.C.O.s stating the position as it stood at that time, and telling them how open warfare had superseded the old methods, and the seriousness of our predicament on that and the neighbouring sectors. He also laid stress on the point of the absolute necessity of holding the line at all costs, and stopping any further advance for forty-eight hours from midnight, after which space of time it was considered by those in a position to know that the imminent danger of a break-through involving the loss of Amiens, and still greater consequences, would be averted. It is to be presumed that by this time the reserves and reinforcements could be brought up to fill the breach. On the previous day, March 26, 1918, the Governments of France and Great Britain decided to place the supreme control of the operations of the French and British forces in France and Belgium in the hands of General Foch, who, accordingly, assumed control.

In view of the mystery surrounding everything connected with the Boche attack and the British failure to hold him, the extract from an article written by Mr. Robert Blatchford in the London "Sunday Herald," on September 22, 1918, will make the position at the time considerably clearer. This writer of world-wide fame as a military critic and strategist has made public praise of the highest order for all Australian soldiers, and the article below was greatly sought after and read by all members of the A.I.F. He wrote:—

"Now I will state as well as I can and as far as I know that part the Australians took in the defence of Amiens, and in the subsequent recapture of the ground lost in the spring retreat. I think a sketch of this section of the great battle, or campaign, will help us to grasp the larger situation, and will enable us to do justice to Sir Douglas Haig, to our splendid British soldiers, and to the gallant and well-led Dominion troops.

"And first of all let me allude in passing to a somewhat prevalent idea that too much kudos has been given to the Dominion

troops and too little to our own, and especially to the English troops.

" If we have been more generous in our praise to the Dominion troops than of our own, that is quite in keeping with our national traits, and is not inexcusable; but in this particular instance the Dominion troops have not received the recognition due to their remarkable achievements, because while the fighting was going on it was not considered advisable to indicate the positions and dispositions of the various armies and divisions.

" Two facts should be now made public. The first fact is that the stopping of the dangerous gap where the Allied lines met, the salvation of Amiens, and the brilliant and audacious victories of Villers-Bretonneux, Hamel, Mont St. Quentin, and Peronne were the work almost exclusively of Dominion troops. The second is that in the darkest hour the Australian troops never ceased to attack, and refused to adopt a policy of immobile defence.

" All this may be conceded to the gallant Anzacs without, as we shall see, doing any injustice to others of our own or Allied troops. Nothing could be finer than the conduct of our British regiments during the retreat, and if there is an Englishman or Irishman or Scotsman or Welshman who believes that there is a better country or a finer people than ours, it is not the particular old relic who has the honour to fill these columns.

" I will not burden our readers' memory with needless detail, but will confine myself to the essential outlines of the Australian operations. The Germans attacked in overwhelming numbers on March 21, and drove back the British on the Cambrai front. The British were surprised, and lost men and guns, but they fell back fighting. It is to be borne in mind that these retreating British troops fought continuously for five or six days and nights against superior numbers, and that they were so exhausted by fatigue and want of sleep that many of them failed to keep awake, and fell into the hands of the enemy.

" At this time the five Australian divisions were on the northern front, in the Ypres and Messines districts. As Sir Douglas Haig had no reserves to depend upon, and as things were very critical, he took the risk of moving four of the Australian divisions towards the south. That is, he reinforced one front by depleting the other. It is true we had large reserves in England, but the German attack was made in France.

" One of the objects of the enemy was to separate the French and British armies; another object was to capture Amiens. The most dangerous and critical point in the Allied line was that part covering Amiens. It was to this threatened and wavering part of the line that the bulk of the Australian forces were finally sent. From about March 26, when the Australians held the line from the Ancre to the Somme, the Germans attacked in force. The Australians held like a steel cable.

" On March 30 the Germans forced back some of the exhausted British troops and threatened Villers-Bretonneux and Hangard. Villers-Bretonneux is on high ground, and overlooks the valley and the city of Amiens, which is distant about ten miles.

as the shell flies. If the enemy could take and hold Villers-Bretonneux Amiens was lost.

"The fighting and manœuvring around Hangard, Villers-Bretonneux, and Albert went on for several days, and the struggle was very severe. The 9th Australian Brigade fought in the air, that is, with exposed flanks and no supports, for three or four days, General Goddard, who commanded, being in action and without rest or sleep for seventy-two hours.

"Finally, the Germans drove the tired and depleted British out of Villers-Bretonneux, and Amiens was exposed. At this time, about April 24, the Australian and New Zealand divisions were drawn out in a thin line from Hebuterne (west of Albert) to the French right flank.

"On the night of April 24 the Australians made a daring and clever counter-attack in the darkness and recaptured Villers-Bretonneux. That stopped the German advance and saved Amiens.

"From that day the enemy made no further attempt to take Villers-Bretonneux or to reach Amiens on that line, and the Australian and New Zealand divisions, disdaining the rôle of immobile defence, attacked and harassed the Germans continually, taking trenches or strong points and capturing guns and prisoners.

"On July 4, General Monash, having just taken command of what was now the Australian Army, made a masterly attack on the Germans at Hamel, and defeated them. In this battle two American battalions took part, and the Tanks did great service.

"On August 8 the Australians, Canadians, and two British divisions made an attack on a large scale. There would be about 25,000 British, 85,000 Australians, and 80,000 Canadians. The attack was arranged so that the French moved at the same time, and a big fight raged on a wide front.

"During this battle the Australians captured 7,000 prisoners and 150 guns, with immense numbers of machine-guns and material of war. The Canadians did equally well, and an American brigade took Chipilly.

"Since that battle the advances and successes of the Australians and Canadians have been almost continuous. They captured Bray and other villages, and drove the Germans back upon Peronne.

"The battle of Peronne was, as everyone who has seen the field and the town would admit, an almost incredible achievement. The Australians did not risk a rash and costly frontal attack, nor waste time in a formal siege. The bridges having been destroyed, and the citadel being almost impregnable, they moved north of the town and attacked the formidable position of Mont St. Quentin. Here after hard fighting and severe losses, and by dint of clever tactics and sheer daring, they defeated the flower of the Prussian Guard, capturing more prisoners than the number of their own forces engaged, and won the height which commands Peronne.

"In two days they captured Mont St. Quentin and Peronne, a feat which had taken the French two months and heavy losses in the first Somme campaign.

" Since August 8 last the Australians have won four important pitched battles, and have taken 17,000 prisoners, over 200 guns, heaps of munitions, machine-guns and stores, and a score or more of villages.

" They are still fighting, still attacking, still advancing. They are in splendid condition, full of fight, unquenchably cheerful, and unshakably confident."

Before leaving the halting place at Behencourt on the night of March 27, a despatch from 7th Brigade Headquarters was received which reported on the position on the front the battery was to cover as far as was known at that time. It reported Boche cavalry as being on the south side of the Somme towards Corbie, and local cavalry fighting at Hamel on the same side of the river.

During that afternoon the 3rd Division Infantry, straight off their march, had taken up positions on a wide front, the 11th Brigade forming the right defensive flank along the bank of the Somme as far as Vaux-sur-Somme. The 10th Infantry Brigade had extended its left flank to take over lightly the defences held by the 33rd Battalion of the 9th Brigade east of Ribemont.

The division in the line, or more correctly the remnants of the English 35th Division, which were in the line when the enemy attacked on March 21, had during the day pushed forward in Marrott Wood (map square J.11.b.), east of Mericourt l'Abbé. The Australian 10th Brigade were therefore given orders to get in touch with them and incorporate the gains held by them in their line.

The 9th Brigade, with one battalion in reserve in Heilly, were responsible for the river from Vaux-sur-Somme to the railway crossing at Aubigny, west of Corbie, inclusive.

## THE FIRST HEILLY POSITION.

*March 27, 1918, to March 29, 1918.*

At 10 p.m. the guns and firing battery wagons moved off from the temporary camping ground outside Behencourt, leaving behind them the first line wagons and teams and other usual impedimenta, the camp being established as immobile or rear wagon lines. It was a gradual rise all the way by road into Franvillers, now entirely evacuated by the civil population, the column passing through in the bright moonlight, and continuing on until the main Albert-Amiens Road was reached, where the column turned to the left in the direction of Albert. Everybody was tired, and most of them ready for a good square meal, so conversation on the way up was limited. Moreover, things didn't look over cheerful, the "forty-eight hours at all costs" being prominent in the men's minds, and the blissful ignorance of what was before them tended more to thought than conversation. Any definite or official news as to what had actually happened or what was about to happen was absent, and the only means of judging the state of affairs was by the surroundings, and these were not too promising. On the way to the battery position scarcely a man in uniform was to be seen, and it again seemed as if the 3rd Division were to stop the Huns' rush and bear the whole weight of the Western Front offensive on their shoulders.

About a thousand yards along the main road the column turned to the right, following a track through paddocks and cultivated fields to the position situated on the high ground to the rear and to the north of Heilly. Here, the guns being unlimbered, the poles of the firing battery wagons were dropped alongside their respective guns for ammunition supply; the gun limbers being unloaded, teams and limbers proceeded to a pre-arranged spot, not far from Franvillers, where forward limber lines were established.

Owing to the rapidity of movement of the enemy in his advance, and the temporary nature of positions occupied by the guns, forward wagon lines for gun limbers and their teams and the teams of the firing battery wagons, together with officers' and staff horses and their horseholders, were always established near to the battery position, and close handy for an immediate move, should it be necessary. The horses were always ready harnessed, communication with the battery being maintained by signal lamp day and night. In the event of the one position being occupied for a longer period than two days, team horses would be changed over with those from the rear wagon lines in order to rest them.

From conversation later with men of the 3rd Division Infantry it was learned how wholly unprotected was the line in those sectors before their arrival, as apart from the remnants of the 35th Division Infantry, who after six days of fighting and retiring were by this time worn out and unable to withstand any deter-

mined attack by fresh enemy troops, there was no one to stop a further advance. It was stated that of artillery to back them up there was none, with the exception of one 13-pounder battery of R.H.A., the only battery to many miles of the new line.

Although the front at the time of the battery's arrival was comparatively quiet, it was looked upon as merely a lull before a continuation of the enemy's attack, which might eventuate at almost any hour. Our infantry in the course of taking over the "line," which was in no way clearly defined—only the approximate position of the enemy's forces being known—found no defending infantry to take over from, in which case they simply went forward until they found the Boche, when, after an exchange of shots, they would dig themselves in and organise defences. It was a common occurrence for Huns who had lost their bearings to stray into our lines quite unaware of there being any troops to oppose them.

Once the guns of the battery were in position, the usual digging-in had to be done to provide some sort of protection from the weather for the gun detachments and others. The sector to be covered by the battery was not clearly defined, but included Marrett Wood, and both sides of it, distant about 3,500 yards as the shell flies.

In the early hours of March 28, shortly after the battery had pulled into position, Captain Rourke went forward to pick out, if possible, a point of vantage suitable for an O.P., which was to be manned that night in readiness for daylight the next morning. His revolver was in his hand ready for action, as reports were prevalent that Boche cavalry had been seen on the slopes on the southern side of the Albert Road during the day. The high ground as far as the crest on the forward side was devoid of any cover as far as could be seen by the half-light of the moon. However, a mangel-wurzel heap by the side of a branch road running up from Heilly to the Albert Road was discovered and picked as the best that could be done at the time.

Captain Rourke and two telephonists slept there for the rest of that night, dawn breaking the following morning wet and cold. A fresh O.P. was then chosen alongside a hay rick, and from there a better view of the front was obtainable. The breakfast hour came and went, but no sign of the anxiously awaited breakfast. Towards midday some dixies of cold water were filled, and a tin of hard biscuits running to one biscuit per man and a half rasher of cold fried bacon were on issue.

During the previous night enemy shells were heard bursting on the left of the battery on the main Amiens Road, and also to the right in the village of Heilly. During the day our patrols could be seen sheltering from the shell fire in a chalk pit to the left of Marrett Wood, and during the afternoon a fairly heavy enemy bombardment was opened, covering a local attack in the neighbourhood of the wood, in an attempt to gain the village of Mericourt l'Abbé. At the same time this village was subjected to a heavy fire, as also was the village of Ribemont, on the northern and opposite bank of the River Ancre. This bombardment was the covering fire of a fresh attack delivered by the enemy between 7 and 8 a.m. on the

morning of March 28, and fighting of the utmost intensity ensued in an endeavour to take the city of Arras on both sides of the River Scarpe. Strong local attacks were also launched by the enemy as far south as Dernancourt, a village only a couple of miles north of Ribemont.

However, the attacks in the main were successfully repulsed, heavy casualties being inflicted owing to the massed formation of the attackers, the fog, which had so greatly helped the enemy on the day of his first attack (March 21), being absent on this occasion. With this attack the first stage of the enemy's offensive weakened, and eventually closed on April 5.

Only a matter of hours previously, the inhabitants left the villages on our front; and the livestock belonging to them, including horses, cows, pigs and fowls now roamed through the streets and open paddocks, homeless and untended. A cow not knowing what all the noise was about, was noticed aimlessly walking about not far from the battery O.P. A handful of hay was sufficient to get her to stand still, and in a short time a good warm drink was provided for the party at the O.P., and was greatly appreciated.

During the day three ammunition dumps were exploded in different parts of our lines some considerable distance away, which showed that the advance had not yet been finally stemmed.

Towards evening the rain increased and the weather was decidedly colder, and in consequence better shelter was sought. A few hundred yards further forward a covered trench built by the French and evidently part of the defensive line in front of Amiens was found, and this was used by the O.P. party as sleeping quarters for the second night, and Major Irwin, of the 25th Battery, and his party shared the shelter. This, however, was not to be of long duration, as orders were received from Group about midnight for the battery to move forward at 3 a.m. to a spot on the other side of the river Ancre, and there await orders, as a fresh attack by the enemy was expected at dawn the following morning in the neighbourhood of Morlancourt. In the darkness and rain between midnight and 3 a.m. gear had to be packed up, horses and teams brought up from the limber lines, and personal kit stowed away—the latter not a very big undertaking these days, as most had learned the wisdom of travelling "lightly."

At the appointed hour the guns and wagons moved forward by way of the village of Heilly and so across the bridge which gave access to the high ground on the opposite side and which separated the two rivers, the Ancre and the Somme, the intervening ground gradually narrowing until the point is reached, below Corbie, where the Ancre joins the River Somme. All the bridge crossings at this time were mined by the engineers ready to be sprung immediately the necessity arose, and so to impede, if only for a short space, the enemy's approach. On coming to a halt in the indistinct light of dawn, a few hundred yards the other side of the river, the battery formed up in close formation in a paddock alongside the road to await orders, and in a state of readiness to be whipped in at any given point where they might be needed. The other three batteries of the brigade had received map locations and orders to take up

definite positions, and while the 27th "stood to" they proceeded into action, and sustained a certain number of casualties in doing so. Enemy shells were bursting occasionally on the rear slopes of the open paddocks leading up to the crest, and along which ran the road connecting Vaux-sur-Somme with Méricourt l'Abbé. However, the luck of the 27th remained with them on this occasion, as in many other instances, and no shells burst close enough to do any damage. Had a stray shot lobbed amongst them the result would hardly bear picturing, drawn up as they were in close formation and without the slightest cover for men and horses. It was also fortunate that enemy planes were absent from that part of the line, as our protecting planes were seldom seen in the first few days after the battery's arrival.

The hours of waiting were spent by some of the men in sleeping, rolled up in their great coats on the grass, most of them being still tired from the long march and cold and hungry from the previous days of short rations and missed meals. There was also a famine in regard to matches, cigarettes, and tobacco, and especially the former, as the small stocks carried by individuals had run out and fresh supplies were quite unobtainable, as the men were in the land where canteens were no more. The man who possessed a match was in great demand, and in the same way a certain lucky gunner, who went along munching a piece of an "Anzac Wafer," as the hard biscuits were sometimes termed, caused quite a stir, and his reply to everyone's question as to where he got it gave no satisfaction. However, at about 8 a.m. that day orders came for a move forward to a position in J.14.d, just below the crest of the ridge, and here the trails of the guns were dropped and the zero line of fire laid out by the map on Morlancourt church spire, the aiming point used being Franvillers Church to the left rear of the line of guns.

## THE SECOND HEILY POSITION.

*From March 29, 1918, to April 24, 1918.*

The expected attack did not come to pass—not, at any rate, on the battery's sector, which that day was being held by the 37th Battalion of the 10th Brigade.

In this position the gun teams and firing battery teams were picketed a couple of hundred yards in rear of the guns, and remained there for several days until the positions on that front were more firmly held. Towards midday the first cooked meal was served to the men at the battery, arrangements having been made for rations to be prepared at the wagon lines and sent to the battery by the cook's cart. In this way cooked food was made possible for the men at the guns, but during the first few days, owing to the distance from the rear wagon lines, the tea and stew had more often lost most of their heat on the way up.

Some good work was done by the men at the wagon lines in the way of salvage, and some really good stews were forthcoming. Stray live stock of all sorts was still at large, and the butchers got a good deal of practice. However, the supply did not last long, and chickens were the first to disappear from the menu. During the first few weeks after the battery's arrival, had it not been for the salvage that was possible, the position would indeed have been a serious one. As it was, many men experienced for the first time what genuine hunger really meant, and no blame attached itself to any for wringing a chicken's neck and cooking it on the spot in the ashes of a fire and, in spite of its being only half cooked, enjoying it.

The battery O.P. was at once established on the high ground between Marratt Wood and the Bray-Corbie Road. The trench was used as a strong point in the support line for infantry to retire on in the event of an attack, and a good view of the country around Morlencourt, which was held by the enemy, was obtainable. Dernancourt and the church in Albert with the leaning Cross on top were visible to the left, and many roads on the high ground in rear of Morlencourt offered frequent targets.

In an open paddock within a small space in rear and to the left of this village entirely in the open were six enemy batteries of twenty-four guns in all, drawn up and ready for action. No attempt had been made at concealment, and with glasses and a telescope the gunners could plainly be seen about their work. It seemed evident that on this sector the Boche felt very secure in his new positions, and took no heed of the possibility of any artillery opposition on our side.

It was not long, however, before the Hun had their supposition shattered, as by eleven o'clock on the morning of the 29th, shortly after the battery's arrival in the new position, and in spite of the long range, his batteries were continually sprayed with time

shrapnel and H.E. bursts, Nos. 1 and 2 guns doing some excellent shooting, with an angle of sight of 5 degrees elevation and between 5,000 and 6,000 yards on the range drums, equivalent to about 8,000 yards, the enemy guns and gunners could just be reached. The guns were all either 77 mm. or 4.2-in. hows., and at intervals the gunners could be seen carrying out their duty shoots in the direction of Dernancourt. At the first few rounds some of the Huns could be seen making for the rear, where they hopped down into a trench. Only a few more rounds were required for all to go for their lives, and as many as thirty could be counted making for safety. Until dark that night the Fritzes in that neighbourhood had an anxious time. The gunners would be allowed to come out of their trench and around the guns, and fresh salvos from all the batteries of the brigade would greet them, as by this time the other batteries using the same O.P. had registered the target. Although the 18-pounder is not an ideal gun for counter battery work, a considerable amount of damage must have been done at this time and casualties inflicted. In addition to this target, there were unlimited opportunities for sniping smaller parties of men and transport, and any movement noticed was immediately fired upon. All the enemy's movements were carried out so openly it looked as if he placed very little importance upon the opposition he expected to meet with on our side, and the extensive shelling he was subjected to in the forward areas after the arrival of the batteries must have come in the way of a great surprise to him.

In support of this theory is the fact that on the following day only fourteen guns could be counted in the place that was being shelled by the battery the previous day, evidently having been removed to a safe spot or to ordnance for repairs, and the movement generally in the enemy lines was substantially reduced.

For the first day or two conditions were most trying at the guns. Rain was continuous, and the hurriedly knocked-up "bivvies" for the men were far from adequate to keeping out the wet. Following the rain a cold "spell" set in and hard frosts relieved the hardships due to frequent wettings. Considering previous positions the battery had occupied and the old method of warfare, as regards enemy shelling this and the following positions were comparatively free the greater part of the time, except on certain days when the shelling was almost continuous.

On March 30, during a day of incessant rain, the enemy so far recovered himself to open a fresh attack on the right flank of the battery's sector, the attack being aimed at a further advance, the 40th Battalion bearing the full force of the attempt. One of the assembling grounds used by the Boche troops was the gully adjacent to Mallard Wood, and from the battery O.P. previously mentioned his attacking troops in swarms could be seen coming forward along the main Bray-Corbie Road on the skyline. This attack by the infantry opened about 11.45 a.m., covered at the same time by a heavy area strafe on the sectors attacked and also on the sectors adjacent thereto, the ground forward and in rear of the O.P. being subjected to very heavy shelling by the enemy

batteries. At the O.P. the excitement was intense, as, apart from the exceptional shelling, five enemy planes were flying at a low altitude, using their machine guns on the strong points and support trenches in which the O.P. was situated. Communication with the battery was interrupted, as the telephone line was broken, making it impossible to get the guns of the battery on to the target that the advancing huns offered. However, the linesmen soon had the line repaired, and it was not long before well-timed shrapnel bursts were causing casualties among the enemy's infantry on both sides of the main road. Some could be seen to fall, some would turn back at the run to shelter behind the cover afforded by a haystack alongside the road, while others continued on until they disappeared from view behind the crest of the high ground on the right. No advance was attempted in the centre of the battery's sector, but at the time it was thought probable that an attempt was likely to eventuate there also.

Although this attack was advanced on a wide front, and massed formations were concentrated on sectors immediately adjacent, the attacks were quite unsuccessful, although in minor local parts the enemy gained a temporary footing to be driven out later during the afternoon by infantry of the 3rd Australian Division and the 66th English Division.

During these attacks the enemy suffered heavy casualties, at the same time gaining no appreciable strategical advantage whatever to compensate for his loss of life.

During this attack, which lasted until about 2 p.m. the same afternoon, the 26th Battery, which occupied a position immediately on the 27th Battery's left flank, had one man killed and four rather seriously wounded, but the 27th were fortunate to escape unscathed, with the exception of one gun, Sergt. Johnson's ("F" Sub.) being put out of action.

All this time while attacks were probable every day, and more particularly at dawn, the battery had a taste of what the Hun was eventually to experience in the months following that memorable day August 8, 1918—the opening of the Allied offensive in the same neighbourhood.

At dawn every day the drivers at the wagon lines, situated at this time in the village of Heilly, had orders to "stand to" in case of an attack in which it might be necessary for more ammunition to be taken to the battery or the guns to be moved to a different position. At the guns everything had to be in readiness for a counter barrage to be opened, and during the night shoots known as "counter preparation" were carried out at intervals. These duty shoots were usually short bursts of fire, concentrated on one particular area, which from aeroplane photos or other means of observation were suspected battery positions close up to their front line and ready for use when their next attack opened. One of these was K.25a 76 near the battery's S.O.S. line and N.N.E. of the village of Sainly Laurette.

On March 31 the 3rd and 4th Australian Divisions finally relieved the 35th English Division, the 7th and 8th Brigades of the 3rd Division Artillery covering the 11th Infantry Brigade,

the S.O.S. line being north of Sailly Laurette. On this day "A" Sub's gun was taken forward to a position in rear of Marratt Wood, for the express purpose of engaging targets otherwise out of range, and in all fifty-four rounds were fired by this gun with exceptionally fine results, the guns of enemy batteries in the open being fired on and the results observed.

April 1 was a sad day for the 7th Brigade. During the morning an enemy battery was engaged in shelling a sunken brickfield on the Bray-Corbie Road at its highest point, supplying as it did a zero point for enemy batteries, having two high brick chimneys visible from a great distance. During the day Lieut.-Col. W. Churchus, the C.O. of the 7th Brigade; Captain G. J. Green-shields, the Adjutant; and Lieut. K. C. Radford were all killed by one shell at Brigade Headquarters, which was situated at this time in this brick factory.

This loss to the brigade necessitated the administration being taken over by the 8th Brigade Headquarters, Lieut.-Col. Allsopp being the Commanding Officer. The command of the 7th Brigade was shortly afterwards taken over by Lieut.-Col. James, late of the 25th Battery.

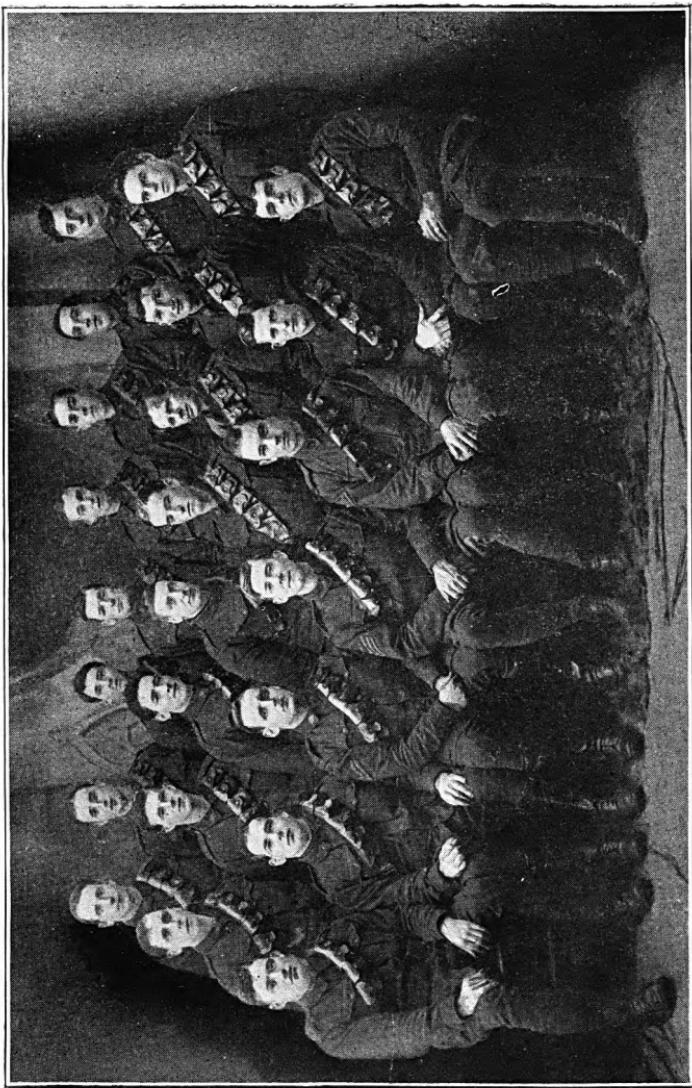
The following day a gun from the 25th Battery was forward in the same position occupied by "A" Sub's gun the day previously, and did a lot of shooting on special targets. However, they were evidently observed, as during the afternoon the spot surrounding the gun was immediately heavily shelled, and although shells fell and burst within feet of the gun itself and on all sides around it was undamaged.

On April 4 three guns of the battery were moved to a different position, in a hedge to the right of the old line, but only some hundred yards or so distant, the reason being that a new sector—and to the right of the original one—had been allotted to the battery, necessitating a big right switch if the old position was still occupied, but three guns still remained on the old line of fire. During the previous night a shallow trench had been dug between two woods known as Welcome Wood (or Vaux Wood) and Carrois Wood, to be used the following morning as an O.P. on the new sector the right half of the battery had taken over. The zero point for the new line was the cross-roads on the south side of the Somme, and opposite Sailly Laurette.

In the early hours following dawn on the morning of April 4, with anything but good visibility, obscured by a thick, damp mist, the party for the O.P. left the battery, making for the new trench, which on a clearer day would be immediately under the enemy's observation. The party consisted of Mr. E. J. Pope, Gunners A. E. Goldfinch and K. Andrews. On crossing the Bray-Corbie Road it was plain to see that something of more than ordinary moment was taking place, and from the artillery fire on both sides everything pointed to an enemy attack being in progress. Australian infantry in reserve were sheltering as best they could from the shell-fire, which was heavy. The village of Vaux-sur-Somme and the neighbourhood of the old stone windmill behind the Welcome Wood were being plastered with enemy shells.

*December, 1918.*

**"F" SUB-SECTION.**





Batteries of the 8th Brigade had positions here in rear of these woods, the 18-pounders being just behind the crest as it fell away from the wood, and the 108th Howitzer Battery being down in the gully, and the whole neighbourhood on that day was a particularly "hot shop."

On reaching the trench dug for the O.P.—a cutting about two feet deep with loose earth thrown up in front of it, allowing of heads and shoulders to show over the top—the visibility in the first hour or so did not permit of observation in the enemy's lines. Towards ten o'clock in the morning the mist lifted, and in spite of a thin rain falling the slopes on the far side of the river were visible, and a considerable amount of movement also along the roads on the high ground. The Huns could be seen driving cows back along the road, evidently having found them in the fields, and they were endeavouring to get them back to a place of greater safety.

Later in the morning one solitary Hun prisoner was being marched back and passed close to the battery O.P. It was then learned that the village of Bouzecourt had been captured by the enemy. Stretcher parties were continually going to and fro, and the shelling continued without abating. Welcome Wood itself was subjected to a heavy fire, mostly 5.9's bursting in it without doing a great deal of damage.

During the morning the battery was in action, the fire being directed from the O.P. on enemy infantry with good effect. They could be plainly seen advancing down the slopes towards the opposite bank of the river, and many a Hun was stopped by the deadly fire of shrapnel from our batteries. Shortly before midday the party at the O.P. were surprised by a whizz-bang bursting immediately in front of their trench, followed almost directly after by another which burst immediately in the rear, the shell actually loosening the earth thrown up in front of the trench in its flight before bursting within 3 feet of the back of the trench. The explosion was deafening, and these two bursts were immediately followed by a further four rounds in rapid succession, which spoke only too eloquently of open sights and direct observation of their shelter. Had the party not remained about ten or fifteen minutes in the bottom of the trench without moving a muscle during that time the probability is that few of them would have got out of it. This led the Hun observer to believe his shots had been successful, and naturally he would be looking around for a fresh target. At the end of this time a dash was made for a safer possey, and the party were lucky to escape without any casualties other than a few holes through a telescope and the wooden legs of the stand being cut in two. Previous to this episode Captain Owen, in another trench used as an O.P. by the 8th Brigade a couple of hundred yards further, had been shelled, and three times had they returned to it, only to be chased away again each time.

On the 5th of the month the battery position and paddocks for some distance around were subjected to "area strafes" by enemy batteries, and for the time being the position had to be partially

evacuated. The bombardment commenced shortly after dawn, and lasted several hours, everybody being obliged to keep under what cover the ground and surroundings offered. This bombardment was to cover an attack by the enemy in the neighbourhood of Dernancourt to the south of Albert, but his attempt was completely frustrated, and he received a very rough handling, 300 yards of his own line being captured instead. At this time as many as eighty-eight German divisions were engaged on the Somme front. Bombardier W. F. Lyons was slightly wounded during the shelling, but he returned to duty within the next few days, to be evacuated again for several months. The battery that day fired 600 rounds per gun, this being a day of exceptionally hard work for the gunners.

The next few days were bright and sunny, of good visibility, and naturally great aerial activity on both sides. During the morning of April 6 a flight of six or eight enemy planes, mostly of the Albatross model, were seen flying at no great altitude over our lines. They were engaged by our anti-aircraft batteries, of which there was one consisting of two guns on the lower road in rear of the battery, close to the Railway Halt at Heilly. Their mission on our side of the lines was evidently a small bombing raid, also for observation and purposes of photography, some of the planes dropping small bombs around the houses in Heilly village. By this date the organisation behind our lines had had time to re-assert itself, and regular patrols of observing and fighting planes were on their beats, and on this occasion it was a good sight to see our planes racing to tackle the intruders. The rattle of the opposing planes' machine-guns could soon be heard, this being the usual signal for all within sight and hearing to "down tools" and follow all the various phases of the "box on." On this occasion one of the "Fritzers" was to meet his doom. While almost directly over the battery position, where the original line of guns had been, one of the Hun planes was seen to be hit, at the same time making a nose dive downward with terrible velocity. The men around the position were just about glued to the spot, with a feeling of numbness from the hips downwards. To be helpless on the spot where a full-sized aeroplane, smoking and in flames, was rushing headlong downwards, with the probability of a cargo of bombs waiting for the crash of the impact to explode them when the wreck strikes the earth, is no pleasant position to be in, and consequently there was a scatter in all directions when the situation allowed itself to be grasped. The noise of the falling plane was a terrific rushing sound, sufficient to unsteady the best man's nerves, and the sickening thud and tremble of the earth at the impact is not likely to be forgotten. The engine and what was left of the framework almost completely buried itself to a considerable depth in the earth and at a spot within five yards of "A" Sub's gun-pit. Fortunately for those in the vicinity, the bombs, if there were any on the plane, did not explode, and scarcely a trace of the pilot and his observer but the charred remains of their bodies could be found. No identification was possible, and the remains were buried where they fell.

The same day another Fritz plane was seen from the O.P. to fall in flames in his own lines, and one of ours was driven down by an enemy patrol. Planes being in use by the enemy at this time were frequently our own machines repainted, and which had presumably been captured during the recent advance; the consequence was that no plane, however marked—whether with the rings of red, white and blue or the big black cross—was to be trusted. In this connection an episode occurred which illustrates the difficulties that arose.

Shortly before sunset one evening about this time one of our planes, ostensibly an R.E.8—familiarly spoken of as an “old bus”—and used only for observation patrol work, was circling round in a small radius near the battery position, and in the course of his flight continually passed over several infantrymen who were engaged on digging a chain of trenches to be used in a case of emergency. The locality where this work was being carried out would be under observation from parts of the enemy's lines and evidently having seen them, he was doing his best to hamper their work by putting over a number of rounds of 4.2's, which were not a great distance off their mark.

Thinking this plane was anything but what it professed to be, but was really one of our captured planes with a Fritz pilot, one of the machine gunners without more ado fired several rounds from the Lewis gun at the plane when immediately overhead. He would then fly away to some distance and return again later, to be greeted with a few more rounds. His action in conjunction with the enemy shelling certainly looked suspicious, but, as a matter of fact, he was ranging and observing a shoot that the 27th Battery were engaged upon, giving the corrections for line and range by wireless to 7th Brigade Headquarters, who, in turn, passed down the orders for the guns by 'phone to the control at the battery. These shoots, in conjunction with planes, were known as “N.F.” Zone calls, enabling an observing plane to bring fire to bear on particular targets at short notice, and at the same time observing and correcting the firing. The thoughts, and probably the language, of the pilot at being fired on while executing his duty can best be imagined!

For the sector the battery was covering at this time a good O.P. was a necessity, but owing to the nature of the ground and it almost all being under observation, a good O.P. was difficult to locate. Several were tried after the first one in the prepared trench. The second day a shell hole near the same place was used, but that also was subjected to a great amount of shelling. The next place used was a drain-hole at the side of the Bray-Corbie Road, but this was enfiladed by a battery firing right down the road from the direction of Bray, and was made uninhabitable, and, later, a deep hole was specially dug during the night close to the infantry patrol posts and within only a few hundred yards of the Hun line from where a good view was obtainable.

For all these different points the usual telephone lines had to be run from the battery, all of which work had to be done after dark and frequently under indiscriminate fire of enemy batteries.

All these O.P.'s had to be manned before daylight and evacuated after dark, making a very long trying day, frequently in the rain, with no shelter, and always in the cold. The spring was by now well under way, and the days were naturally long ones; from 4 a.m. until 6.30 p.m. was the usual period of duty.

In the intervening days at the battery a site was selected for the men's humpies to be erected under two hedges, giving some protection from observation and also from shell fire. Corrugated iron for roofs was obtainable to a limited extent, and for the rest a scratch in the bank with a waterproof sheet completed the sleeping quarters. On April 9 a similar area strafe to that experienced on April 5 took place mainly around the two guns, which so far had not been moved from their original position, and this shelling caused the decision to move the bivvies to a flank with greater protection. This day "Skipper," a stray dog that had attached himself to the battery, was killed. He was a thorough sportsman, and in spite of being called to, he refused to stop chasing nearly every shell that burst in the vicinity, barking it at it to show his full disapproval of the procedure. Unfortunately, he was new at the game and did not know the finer points in the latest of civilised occupations, and so died, being denied even a dog's chance.

This day will be well remembered, as the shelling round the battery coincided with the opening of the enemy's attack and advance in the north, in which Armentières, Bailleul and other towns were captured. It tends to prove, however, that the advance in the south along the Somme was a failure and the enemy well knew it, for, in spite of ground being captured to a depth of between 20 and 30 miles, the objective (Amiens) had not been reached, and after the first week in April had been spent in vain attempts to break through, he had been rewarded with nothing but failures. Hence his attempt in the north to reach the coast ports, Calais and Boulogne.

On this day, which opened with a dense fog, the shelling commenced about 7 a.m. and kept on continuously until 8.15 a.m. when it became less intense, but during the morning Sergeant L. W. Barclay and Corporal A. S. Pannington were both hit by splinters, the former getting to Blighty and returning to the battery about three months later, while the latter was only off the strength for about three weeks.

The following day "C" and "D" Sub's guns were removed to a detached position in rear of the other four guns, which turned out to be an ideal position. These two guns performed all the shoots necessary during the day, and in this way distracted attention from the position where the main battery was situated.

From this time onwards the living was high owing to the food-stuffs of all kinds obtainable by salvage in the evacuated villages near by, such as Mericourt l'Abbe, Ribemont, and Corbie—all or any of which might at any time fall into the hands of the enemy and were being continually shelled by his guns. Sugar, flour, bully beef, red wine, asparagus, cooking utensils—all were made

use of and many of the shacks started small messes of their own to supplement the somewhat scanty rations. Pancakes were the order of the day, bully beef rissoles before dark for supper, macaroni, stewed, boiled, baked and burned, rock cakes true to their name in every respect, and new dishes and concoctions galore were tried, eaten and enjoyed, whether a success or otherwise.

About this time a certain N.C.O. in the battery, and a pretty rough one, too, was sick and tired of his stripes, with the incumbent responsibility, and feeling himself pretty certain that they would not survive many more " roarings up " from his superior officers, decided to parade and apply to be reverted to the rank of gunner. His wording of his verbal application was short. It ran: " Will you please disrate me now at *my* request, or wait till to-morrow and tell *me* to ! " He was successful.

One of the difficulties that made for a real want for those at the position was the lack of water, as none was available near the battery, and all water for drinking, cooking, and washing had to be carted from the wagon lines, which meant that for washing there was often a shortage. The rations were still cooked at the wagon lines, and one memorable day the horses in the pill-box bolted, and the troops' dinner with them.

From April 12 until the 20th, the battery were occupied in mostly counter preparation shoots of half an hour's duration, three times during the night, and during the day in firing on observed targets or special shoots in connection with local infantry operations, in which the guns would search and sweep given areas.

On April 19 " D " Sub's gun went forward to a position close up to the trenches, and a little to the right flank of Battalion Headquarters. Their target was a wood on the opposite side of the river, and from their position they were able to use open sights and a direct lay. Considerable consternation was caused among the Huns in the wood, and it could be seen that the fire was quite effective, but unfortunately they were picked up rather earlier in the piece than was expected, and only 128 rounds were fired by the detachment before an enemy battery had their range to a nicety, and they had to take cover temporarily as the enemy fire was very accurate. Sergeant C. A. Cobbett, the Number One of the gun, and Gunner R. S. Peebles were both wounded during the morning, but not seriously, but unfortunately the gun was knocked out by the hostile battery, which continued shelling the locality for several hours. Every time a lull in the shelling permitted, the crew got to work and put a few more over, but their fire was quickly replied to, their flashes being visible to the enemy at every round they fired. The drivers that night pulled the damaged gun back without casualties. The other men of the detachment were Bombardiers R. G. Brooks, F. L. Stewart, and Gunner J. A. Hay, and they escaped without injury. The operation, under the direction of Captain Rourke and Mr. J. R. Windeyer, was well carried out, and the infantry had the opportunity of seeing a somewhat daring escapade successfully accomplished, and also the joy of seeing Hun being " knocked " before their eyes by their own artillery. How-

ever, no "mentions" were made, it being considered that the men in question did no more than their duty.

That night, April 19, proved a bad one for the men at the wagon lines in Heilly. Some days previously an enemy battery had put a few rounds—seemingly registration rounds—over, and short, of the farmhouses in which the drivers were billeted. The horses were in an adjacent paddock on lines in the open, but sleeping quarters of the men were in the farm buildings of the first house in the village street on entering Heilly by the Fransvillers Road. A few of the men who had a presentiment that there would be more shells to follow, moved their billets and off the line of fire, but many remained in the old billets. During the night in question a few shells, on the same line as previously, burst in and around the buildings, one of them striking the roof of a barn in which a number of men were sleeping in the loft under the roof. The bursting of the shell caused the floor to give way on one side, and several of the occupants were injured. Gunner T. Hepburn was killed instantaneously, and Gunner M. Turnbull was so seriously wounded that he died in hospital after his removal. Bombardier D. F. Boyd and Gunner H. E. Baker eventually went to "Blighty," as also did Gunners J. T. Collins and J. A. Greatorex. The others were only slightly wounded, and they were Gunner O'Connor and Drivers E. Brooks, A. Baker, K. Kirk, and Shoeing Smith L. Stott. It is remarkable to note that all the serious casualties were sustained by gunners who were at the time down at the wagon lines for a short spell before returning to the battery to relieve other gunners, who would change places with them in due course. Gunner Hepburn's body was interred in a small graveyard close to the billets.

These shells were in reality the preliminaries to heavy area shelling that opened at 3.45 a.m. on April 24 on all localities from the front line to as far back as the "back areas."

On Sunday morning, April 21, there was a considerable amount of activity in the air, owing to bright sunshine and good visibility. On this day Cavalry Captain Baron von Richthofen was brought down close to the battery. About 11 o'clock in the morning most heads were turned upwards watching a big flight of enemy planes, numbering between 25 and 30, which were flying at a height of about 8,000 feet. As a smaller number of our machines were seen in the vicinity, the fight which ensued was watched with interest, but as is usual, owing to the height and the difficulty of picking out the contesting planes, no great amount of certainty as to who was getting the best of it was possible. Shortly afterwards what were taken at the time to be two of our planes and a Fritz were seen flying low down to the right of the battery's guns, and our planes seemed to be chasing the enemy plane. By this time the remaining enemy planes were some miles away and still at a great height. The fugitive looked likely to land at any moment, as all seemed to be only a matter of a few hundred feet from the ground, and in order to see the finish, several of the men from the battery ran up the rising ground as

the three planes had disappeared in the hollow over by Vaux-sur-Somme. In the meantime the anti-aircraft batteries had been firing at the plane, and many ground machine gunners belonging to infantry in the trenches and Lewis gunners with the Field Artillery Batteries had fired a good number of rounds in his direction. Shortly afterwards the trio were seen to appear over the crest, making in the direction of the battery, but all at once the leading plane, a triplane, was seen to make a sharp turn to the left, fly straight upwards almost perpendicularly in the air for about 50 feet, and then turn and drop like a weighted feather nose downwards until striking the ground. All the events happened within a space of minutes and immediately the plane was seen to have crashed there was the usual stampede for a nearer view and the probability of souvenirs. Just previous to the plane's fall one of our planes flew in a bee line, presumably making for an aerodrome in the direction of Heilly, and it appeared at that time that possibly the pilot or observer had been wounded, hence their hurry and at such a low altitude. The place at which the triplane fell was some 3,000 yards from the front line at its nearest point, within our lines, and on the high ground near the chimneys of the brick factory on the Bray-Corbie Road, and in full view of parts of the enemy's lines, and the excitement can be imagined when it was rumoured and finally corroborated that Baron Richthofen, the famous German pilot had been brought down. Within 15 minutes of the plane striking the ground enemy batteries opened fire on the locality, and a steady bombardment was kept up until nightfall. At the opening shots there was a scatter amongst the crowd surrounding the plane, and there were not many who were so keen on seeing the wreckage at close quarters.

As to the precise method of Richthofen's death there is considerable uncertainty, as the number of his adversaries were many — flying for the last stage of the "dog fight" near the ground gave all machine gunners an opportunity of getting some shots at him. The battery's Lewis Gun Crew at the time was Bombardier R. Fissenden and Gunner Kennedy, and they have almost as much right to claim to bringing him down as any others, as they certainly fired at the plane, but to say with certainty who fired the fatal bullet which passed through the chest from back to front, and was apparently fired from the air from, approximately, his own level, can scarcely be determined.

Shortly after the plane struck, and in spite of the shelling by the enemy with the evident intention of breaking it up, an officer crawled out, and, finding the pilot dead, fastened a rope around the body under fire, and then crawled back again, and from the shelter of a trench the body was dragged out of the machine. Then, from papers on the body, the dead man was identified. The Fokker triplane, No. 2009, with Le Rhone engines made at Frankfurt in March, 118, so that it was quite new, could not be salved until some hours later, owing to the bombardment. It was, however, a total wreck, being badly smashed by the fall. The Baron himself was a clean-shaven young fellow, and was wearing

a flying suit, but no uniform, and in the pockets were a number of documents, including a pilot's certificate, endorsed with the record of his 80 victories in the air, and a gold watch with his crest and initials. It is known that the part played by him on the Western front was that of commander of what was familiarly known as "Richthofen's Circus"—that is, a detachment of picked airmen with machines of different types, but all painted red or red in combination with other gaudy colours—which travelled about the enemy lines from aerodrome to aerodrome, with the object of setting an example of spectacular fighting for the assistance and encouragement of the local flying men.

A document captured the same day that the Baron met his death revealed the reason for his presence on that section of the front. It was a communication from a "group commander of aviation" to the first pursuit squadron (of which Richthofen was commander). It read :—

"It is not possible to fly over the Ancre in a westerly direction on account of the strong enemy opposition. I request that this aerial barrage be forced back in order that a reconnaissance up to the line Marieux-Puchevillers (ten miles behind the front) may be carried out."

The official German report of the end of Capt. von Richthofen stated :—

"Capt. Baron Manfred von Richthofen failed to return from a flying raid on the Somme on April 21. According to the unanimous declarations of those accompanying him, and the observations of various spectators on the ground, Captain von Richthofen pursued an enemy hostile battleplane to the ground. He was at a low altitude, when apparently a defect in the motor forced him to land behind the enemy's lines.

"As the landing was effected without mishap, there was hope that Captain von Richthofen was captured unhurt. Reuter's report of April 23, however, no longer leaves any doubt that Captain von Richthofen met his death. Since Captain von Richthofen was the pursuer he cannot well have been hit by his opponent in the air: he appears rather to have fallen a victim to a chance hit from the ground."

If this report was true, it seemed rather callous treatment for the Germans' best pilot to be shelled by their own batteries within such a short interval of his landing, for had he been only wounded there was every probability of one of their own shells killing him, but that only goes to prove the German method, for having no further use for him—being at any rate a prisoner in our hands—to them he might just as well be dead. Poor thanks indeed from a loving Fatherland for whom he had fought so well.

For the ensuing days aerial activity was most marked, and from April 21 to 23, in the small area of the front that was visible to those at the battery, three hostile planes were seen to be brought down in addition to the "star turn" provided by the Baron.

During a shoot the battery were engaged upon in the late afternoon of April 23 eight or ten enemy planes were over our lines observing, and, after dropping a Verey light, they made back for their own lines. The meaning of the signal was unknown and may, of course, have been only a reply signal to their observers in their own lines; or from the commander of the flight to the other planes under his command.

Late in the afternoon one or two enemy batteries carried out ranging rounds, so it seemed in view of later events, and several shells burst at intervals on the slopes in rear of the four guns in their shallow pits under the hedge. No damage was done, but gas respirators had to be worn for a little while, and most of the men took cover where possible. Only a few gas shells burst in the vicinity, the gas being a comparatively new one, known as Yellow Cross and Green Cross gas—one of the smells predominating being that of ether, and unpleasant stuff at close quarters.

The cook-house, alongside the officers' mess, had a very narrow escape, a shell bursting just outside the tent, Gunners Rust, Yeoman and Donovan all being inside at the time.

On the morning of April 24—a memorable day for many—the surrounding districts on a fairly wide front had a rude awakening at 3.45 a.m., while still dark. At the position the comparative quiet of the early hours of the morning was suddenly interrupted by the Hun barrage opening with a crash, and all around could be heard the shrieks and wails of oncoming shells with their attendant bursts—some at close quarters, giving the impression that those at the battery were the ones he hated most, but it was soon apparent that his attentions were widespread, and for miles around on our side of the line everyone had his own troubles. With almost the first shell—and a great number of them were gas shells, with a free sprinkling of H.E. mustard gas as well—Mr. W. R. Payne, who had only come to the battery about three weeks previously, was wounded whilst asleep in his dug-out, which was in a trench beneath the shelter of a bank. He received a nasty wound in the leg, but was carried on a stretcher almost immediately afterwards to the dressing station in Heilly, nearly a mile distant, and in spite of the heavy shelling which continued without abating. The bearers were Gunners C. James and F. W. Jowett, T. H. Burrett and A. E. Goldfinch.

A little later Gunner L. Ryan was wounded in the foot and also had to be taken to the dressing station, and the first three men mentioned made this second trip—no easy matter on such a "rough" day. Lieutenant Payne had to have his leg amputated, while Gunner Ryan went to Blighty and did not return to the battery.

An order having been received at the wagon lines for ammunition, the first-line wagons had to proceed to the position immediately. The barrage at the time had not slackened in the slightest degree, and Heilly village was being heavily shelled. However,

the team and drivers, under Sergeant F. Bradley, got through the barrage with the ammunition, and returned safely to the wagon lines afterwards.

Within minutes of the opening of the enemy barrage not a sound was to be obtained on the switchboard in the control room anxious buzzing from the operator in his endeavour to "raise" headquarters, or get word through from them. Lateral lines were always run to the other batteries of the brigade, so as to have an alternative line to headquarters, should an incident such as occurred on this day take place when the direct line was "dished," and so communication for the receiving of orders was broken. This was by no means an uncommon occurrence, but that all lines and laterals should be inoperative at one time was a serious position, the battery then being completely isolated. Visual communication was an impossibility, as with the breaking of day it could be seen that a heavy ground mist and fog shut out everything beyond a radius of 25 yards, and no weather conditions could have been more favourable to the Boche to cover his attack, which was taking place on the battery's sector and those sectors to the right as far south as the Avre Valley.

On this morning the enemy advanced to the assault on the whole British front south of the Somme, under cover of fog. Four German Divisions were employed against our forces alone, and German and British tanks came into conflict for the first time. In the ensuing struggle German tanks broke through the line south-east of Villers-Bretonneux and, turning to north and south, they opened the way for their infantry. After heavy fighting, in which his losses were considerable, and were inflicted by the infantry and light tanks, the enemy gained possession of Villers-Bretonneux, but was held up on the edge of the wood, the Bois l'Abbé, just west of that place, by a counter-attack by the 8th English Division. South of Villers-Bretonneux some tanks came into action, and drove back the German tanks, with the result that the enemy's infantry were stopped some distance to the east of the village of Cachy, which formed their objectives. North of Villers-Bretonneux to the Somme, the Australian Divisions repulsed all attacks.

Owing to the fog, an effective counter barrage was almost an impossibility, and the infantry received little or no support from the artillery in beating off the attack. The actual "hopover" commenced about 4.15 a.m., and at Sainly le Sec in front of the 5th Australian Division, four hundred enemy dead were counted after the action.

From about seven o'clock in the morning Bombardier M. T. Bourke was out mending the telephone lines in all the shelling, headquarters dug-outs being nearly a mile distant. It was not until past mid-day that he and Gunner H. L. McClure, who had been helping him, reported that the lines were in working order. All along, the lines had been chopped to pieces; in places whole "chunks" of the wire were blown right out and new wire had

to be inserted. During the morning at headquarters, which at this time had moved from their previous unfortunate position at the brick factory to a small wood on the precipitous banks of the Somme, and nearer to the town of Corbie, more casualties from gas had occurred, and in fact only two signallers were left for duty. Headquarters' total casualties that day were 24 gassed and 7 wounded, among them being Lieut.-Col. James, the new C.O. for 7th Brigade; Lieutenant Smith, the Adjutant; Lieutenant Cook, the Signalling Officer and Lieutenant Peyton.

At the wagon lines in Heilly several horses were killed and maimed, and in spite of the men having moved their billets to bivvies dug in the bank in an open paddock adjacent to the horse lines, for greater protection, the intense barrage of the morning, lasting as it did about nine hours in all, covered almost every five yards of ground for many miles around. The casualties sustained there during the morning were:—

Driver C. D. Harding, wounded; Bombardier L. L. Paul, gassed; Gunner W. Fitzpatrick, gassed; and Driver A. W. McLeish, gassed.

Out of these four, only Drivers Harding and McLeish returned to the battery several months and weeks later respectively. Corporal W. A. Johnston, the battery clerk, was afterwards awarded the M.M. for services on this occasion.

During a lull in the afternoon, Captain Rourke picked out a new position for the four guns of the battery—the detached section remaining in the same position, their rôle still being that of carrying out duty shoots during the daytime.

The Military Medal was afterwards awarded to Bombardier M. T. Bourke, who was in charge of the Battery Staff, for his good work on this occasion.

## THE THIRD HEILLY POSITION.

*From April 24, 1918, to April 26, 1918.*

The position chosen here for the four guns was approximately 1,000 yards to the right rear of the vacated position, and on the same line and to the left of the 30th Battery of the 8th Artillery Brigade. This was the battery to which Mr. Owen had gone on leaving the 27th Battery many months previously, and he was now in command of the battery with the rank of Captain.

The actual position of the gun-pits was the ground in front of an old support trench dug some while previously, and screened from direct observation from the enemy by low trees and under-growth, over the top of which the guns would have to fire. This bush was on the Heilly side of the Bray-Corbie Road, on the highest part of that ground, and not many hundred yards in rear of the brick chimneys, and which are a landmark for miles around. On the left of the battery were reserve trenches, and the 14th Battalion were in occupation there. The shelling of that morning had been of a most searching kind, and it was learnt later that nearly every unit had had casualties of a more or less serious nature. The 30th Battery had two men killed, and the battalion on the left had also had their share.

The usual digging to provide cover for the gun detachments and for sleeping quarters had to be done, and working parties were up preparing the position during the afternoon. Shells were still bursting in the vicinity, but the guns were pulled into position by the teams about 8.30 in the darkness that night, and the drivers got safely away. The digging was exceptionally hard work, owing to the gravel subsoil, and some hard work was put in with picks and shovels. However, night came, and with it rest for some, as most of the men were just about tired out after a day full of incident.

That night was of comparative quiet, around the batteries at any rate, as a counter-attack had rapidly been prepared to take place at 10 p.m. Engaged in this counter-attack were a Brigade of the 18th English Division, and the 13th and 15th Brigades of the 4th and 5th Australian Divisions, and the attack was remarkably successful.

In his dispatch Sir Douglas Haig wrote:—

“A night operation of this character, undertaken at such short notice, was an enterprise of great daring. The instant decision to seize the opportunity offered, and the rapid and thorough working

out of the general plan and details of the attack on the part of the III. Corps Commander and Divisional and Subordinate Commanders concerned are most worthy of commendation, while the unusual nature of the operation called for the highest qualities on the part of the troops employed. It was carried out in the most spirited and gallant manner by all ranks. The 13th Australian Brigade, in particular, showed great skill and resolution in their attack, making their way through belts of wire running diagonally to the line of their advance, across very difficult country which they had had no opportunity to reconnoitre beforehand.

"At daybreak Villers-Bretonneux was practically surrounded by our troops. During the morning two battalions of the 8th Division worked their way through the streets and houses, overcoming the resistance of such parties of the enemy as were still holding out. That afternoon Villers-Bretonneux was again completely in our possession. In this well-conceived and brilliantly executed operation nearly 1,000 prisoners were captured by our troops. A German tank was left derelict in our lines and was salved subsequently."

During the day of April 25 much of the time was spent at the battery in consolidating, and the guns were understood to be more or less in reserve, only shooting in the event of an S.O.S. call which, however, did not come through. Only a Number One and three men to each gun were at the position, the remainder being sent to the wagon lines, which had removed and split up into forward limber lines, situated in a gully behind Heilly, and rear wagon lines, which had gone back to a wood between Frechincourt and Pont Noyelles.

During the morning and just about breakfast time a plane could be heard in the vicinity of the guns, although, owing to the morning ground mist, it was not visible. It seemed that the plane was circling round, as its course was not in any particular direction. It then made its appearance very low down to the right of the guns and was making for the chimneys. Circling round these, it came straight towards the bush that was the only cover the battery could boast of. At the same time the bubbling of Lewis guns on the ground firing at it could be heard, and everybody instinctively took what cover there was in their immediate neighbourhood, or stood still, so as not to attract too much attention. But at the height the plane was flying—not more than 500 feet from the ground—movement would make no difference and any information the occupants of the Boche plane required was theirs if they cared to look. The battery was powerless to stop them; the machine gunners got on to them, but just at the critical moment their gun jammed and was only fit for single shot firing. Bombardier Fissenden put one bullet through his tail but that part of him—like any other "bird"—being only "feathers" and not flesh, did not hurt him. As the plane passed immediately over the battery the observer could be distinctly seen leaning over the side making a mental picture of the

battery's position, and it is assumed that not the minutest detail escaped his eye. Many will remember the round, fat face staring at them from a few feet above, and thoughts instinctively turned to the happy (?) hours to follow after the plane had returned to its aerodrome, or possibly before then, when, in response to a buzz from his wireless key, one of his batteries would open up and shells would again make life miserable around the guns. Moreover, bombs and a machine gun are usually on a plane for lucky targets such as a row of guns presented on a misty morning, and while he flew immediately overhead, cheekily shutting off his engine, to come lower for a closer view, all taste for breakfast left the palates of those just spreading their margarine on their slice of issue! However, a miracle happened in the way of the "Archies" proving themselves, for once, of the greatest value. When the plane had only just passed to the rear of the battery and was above the hollow on the Bonnay side, three well-timed bursts of shrapnel made their puffs of white all round him, and only for a few seconds longer did the plane sustain an even keel, and then with a nose-dive downwards, eventually with the well-known spiral motion which, however, if not done as "kid-stakes" purposely by a clever pilot to mislead his opponents and dodge the firing, means the end has come, and in this case it was only too true—and "one of *theirs* was missing!"

To imagine the observer's feelings, which a moment before must have been full of glee at his surprise visit, and such intelligence to report on his return, changed suddenly in an instant to those of imminent danger and certain death, are hard to picture, but it can easily be imagined the size of the cheer that went up when a catastrophe about to overtake the battery in a short time was almost at the same instant changed to a feeling of safety, and that after all the war was not being lost everywhere!

During the late afternoon of that same day a small strafe by enemy batteries opened on the roadway on the right flank of the 30th Battery. At that time their water-cart with a four-horse team was emptying water at their guns. Teams were also up with ammunition, and for a few minutes things looked rather serious as a shell lobbed close to them, killing and wounding some of the team horses, and starting the water-cart team at a gallop. They were pulled up, however, before reaching the crest of the slope, which dropped sharply towards the Bonnay side. That day was a red-letter one for the Battery men, for with the day's rations in the "pill-box" from the wagon lines came a cook with all his gear to prepare meals on the position for the men, and the first time for a month that this was possible.

The same evening another heavy barrage was audible on the right, but the Battery's guns did not participate, the stunt being off their sector.

The following day the men were intensely satisfied to know that the guns were to be handed over in the pits to a Tommy

Battery of the 105th Brigade, and a change to that of reserve was to be made. The guns of the relieving battery were in rear of Heilly, and the change over was accomplished by about mid-day.

Although the period of action—four weeks—was not as long as some previous positions, the new kind of warfare, most men would agree, was distinctly preferable to the old variety of “residence” in one position without a change for weeks on end, with, perhaps, almost constant shelling and the protection of a corrugated iron roof for safety. Nevertheless the changed conditions—although better in many ways—brought with them many hardships, and “patches” of very heavy shelling were also met, with the additional uncertainty of knowing not what any dawn might bring forth.

## THE RESERVE POSITION AT HEILLY.

*From April 26, 1918, to May 9, 1918.*

The position taken over by the battery here was on the high ground on the left of the road leading from Franvillers to Heilly, and at a point immediately before entering the village street. The line of fire was much the same as that which the guns were laid on when first going into action behind the same village a month previously—but the left front of Marratt Wood was now the line. Small advances locally had taken place in the meantime, and the range at this time would be slightly increased. On arriving at the new position, as there was an ample supply of water in the village, many men indulged in a much-needed bath, in any convenient corner of the empty houses. There was little work of importance to do, and practically no shooting, except the registering and shooting in of the guns, which was carried out by Captain Rourke, who rode with the signaller most of the way to the O.P., and the orders were then transmitted from there to a station just in front of the guns by signal lamp, and passed on by phone the few hundred yards remaining to the battery. Only about 60 rounds were fired by the battery during the fortnight at this position. Parades and inspections were held every morning, and everything polishable had to be shining, and there were not a few who prayed for just a few shells to stop the “spit and polish,” and to remind them that there *was* a war being waged!

From about this time affairs in the air seemed to take a most marked turn in our favour, and the number of enemy planes over our lines, during daylight, at any rate, was on the decrease. In any case, the height at which they usually flew was so great that the information they could glean could hardly be of very great assistance to them, and judging by the reception our planes received while over the enemy's lines, from the countless black bursts in the sky around them, they seemed almost to live over there. Official statistics, or figures, being lacking, it was the general opinion at that time that the turning point in air warfare had been reached, and from then onwards the Allied superiority, both in numbers and skill, steadily increased. On April 29 a Fritz plane was brought down, or, rather escorted down, by some of our planes, not far from Pont Noyelles. The machine landed safely, the pilot having been wounded, but the observer was unhurt. They were both taken prisoners, their machine being in an undamaged condition. The observer was not much more than a boy, being only eighteen years old. They stated that it was their first flight over our lines.



THE "SPOOKS."  
(Signallers.)

*December, 1918.*



In the London "Times" of April 30, the following appeared: "The following telegram has been sent to the General Officer Commanding the Fourth Army:—

Please ask General Birdwood to inform all ranks of the Australian Corps that the Field-Marshal is fully aware of the gallant conduct and magnificent achievement of the Australians, and wishes to thank them."

On and after May 1 activity in the way of new batteries, mostly heavies, "pulling in" was marked. Further up the gully leading to Franvillers were 9.2-in. howitzers and a battery of 60-pounders were on their right, near what had once been a brick-field. Further in rear, and just off the Albert road, were two 6-in. Mark 19 naval guns, with a range of about 19,000 yards.

On May 31 three planes were seen to be brought down in the vicinity of the battery; one of these came to rest close to the forward wagon lines. These lines at this time were only a few hundred yards down the gully, which branched off to the left from the Franvillers road. It was not badly damaged, but the canvas covering of the planes was in ribbons, having been shot through by machine-gun fire, and through coming down in a patch of under-growth. The observer was shot through the back, and was dead when the plane landed, the pilot was wounded and had been made a prisoner.

A couple of days later during heavy rain an enemy battery put five rounds over in the vicinity of the guns, but did no damage. That part of the gully was very thickly populated, all the guns of the four batteries of the 7th Brigade being almost in the same line, with not much more than the usual 20 yards interval between them.

The enemy, presumably, having observed considerable movement in the back areas, and particularly in the village of Franvillers, during the night, he frequently shelled that village, inflicting some casualties on the civilians, a few of whom had returned there to look after their crops and carry on with ploughing, in spite of the proximity of the Huns. Six engineers were also killed in their billet near the church.

On May 9 the battery was handed over to the 3rd Army Brigade and moved to the left, taking over their position at Brèsele. While at this position Mr. Symes reported back to the battery, having obtained a commission at St. John's Wood in the meantime.

## BRESLE POSITION.

*From May 9, 1918, to May 13, 1918.*

The location of this position was on the farther side of the Amiens-Albert Road, and on the left side facing Albert. The guns were close to the village, in fact, only a couple of hundred yards in front of it. The enemy evidently had got wind of a stunt on our side being in preparation, and the firing of his batteries around the position was fairly heavy. One of the first nights after taking over this position an urgent call for ammunition was sent to the wagon lines as news came through that an attack was expected the following morning. Consequently, all available ammunition was taken up in readiness, and some of the teams had narrow escapes in getting safely away from the position when they had unloaded. A considerable number of planes were also over nightly, carrying out bombing raids on targets which our wagon lines and troops' billets offered; neither were his back areas immune from the attentions of our flying men, and, judging solely from what could be seen and heard at night time, the credit balance in weight and numbers was easily on the side of the Allies.

On the morning of May 12 the enemy carried out a raid on a sector to the right of the battery and took seventeen 2nd Divvy infantrymen as prisoners, an infrequent occurrence with Australian Infantry.

The same day Major J. Doherty arrived from the 1st Divisional Artillery and took charge of the battery from that date.

On May 13 the battery was handed over to the 12th Battery of 2nd Australian Division, the gunners and men from the battery proceeding to the wagon lines at Fréchincourt.

## THE SPELL AT COQUEREL.

*From May 14, 1918, to June 2, 1918.*

With *reveillé* at 4.15 a.m. on the morning of May 14, 1918, the battery were on the road in column of route by 8.15 a.m. The road followed was by way of Querrieu, Allonville, Coisie, Bertangles, where Corps Headquarters were situated and also a big aerodrome. Thence, by way of St. Sauveur and La Chaussée Tinterant to Bourdon on the river Somme, where the brigade were to camp for the night.

The weather was fine and hot, and the men once again finding themselves in the "Bock areas" there were some lively scenes in the village that night. An early start was made the following morning, and after following the northern bank of the river all the way, the village of Coquerel was reached about midday.

All the batteries of the brigade were in and around this village, the settling as to who should take the better possies being dependent upon the toss of a coin. Some were more fortunate than others. The 27th Battery could hardly be called one of the fortunate ones, as most of their spare time, and particularly that during the meal hours, was taken up in pounding up and down the dusty hill, to and from the cook-house, which was near the bottom. The horse lines were at the top of the hill, and the billets were in barns and odd corners of the farms on the hilly roadside. Most of the men preferred an open paddock near the horse lines, and the usual "bivvies" soon sprang up in an orchard and field adjacent, being considerably cleaner than having to share a bed with the cocky's poultry. Some of the other batteries had ideal camps, the 25th Battery in particular being alongside the river, handy for a plunge at *reveillé*, and no distance to take their horses to water.

By the time tea was finished at the 27th cook-house, usually about 6 or 6.30, few had the inclination for a swim at that hour, the parades being from 6 a.m. in the morning, and necessarily long on account of the distance to water for the horses.

Lieut.-Col. King, a well-known officer from the Heytesbury Camp in England, was at this time C.O. of the 7th Brigade, having taken the place of Colonel James, who was gassed at Corbie.

Sports were held among the men of the battery on May 20, in a paddock on the opposite side of the river. There was also a signalling competition for a team of signallers from each battery in the Brigade, and the event was won by the 107th Battery's team. On May 26 a Divisional Artillery Race Meeting was held in great style in paddocks near Pont Rémy. Great interest was

taken in the events and some good racing was witnessed. The events included Trotting, Steeplechases and Flat races, and everything was carried out as nearly as possible in a manner true to a pre-war civilian race meeting at Flemington or Randwick. All the riders wore their colours and racing caps, the course itself being bedecked with flags, and with a band playing and Sisters invited from the hospitals and W.A.A.C.'s from Abbeville in the crowd, the proceedings certainly had a homely look. There were a number of bookies—dressed up in "civvy clobber" for the occasion—and with the general noise and excitement intermingled with shouts, such as : "I'll pay Melodious ! " etc., it was hard to believe for that afternoon that there was a war on !

Leave to Abbeville, about 12 kilometres away, was granted to a small percentage on several afternoons. Towards the end of the time mounted parades were frequent, and the battery was out on two or three occasions for manœuvres,

On one occasion when the battery had finished their morning exercises and were in column of route on their way back to the lines, a couple of French women who were working in the field, rushed towards the head of the column full of excitement to tell of what they had just seen in the form of two very suspicious-looking characters in a grey uniform who, on being found sleeping under a bush, had taken to their heels down towards a gully, most of which had young crops growing on it, and provided plenty of cover. That they were spies or escaped prisoners or desperate characters of some sort the farm women had no doubt, and with the Major leading, a party set off at full gallop across country, permission having been given to ride through the crops when on a mission of such importance. The net proceeds, after a 30 minutes hunt, embracing woods and all cover for a few miles round, were three very sheepish-looking Chinamen! Although it was difficult to get an explanation from them, the fact probably was that they had a bad attack of "wind-up," owing to the bombing nightly of Abbeville by enemy planes, and had probably cleared out, thinking anything was better than bombs, and so had kept on walking, and after about two days had begun to feel hungry. They were put at the head of the column and taken back to the wagon lines, where they were fed, and were afterwards put on such jobs as permanent stablemen and chaff cutters. They were good workers and seemed to thoroughly enjoy themselves. When the battery moved off on May 31 the Chinamen went with them until the next day, when a corporal came to take them away. They were not the slightest bit anxious and they must have thought among themselves that the "Twenty-Seventh" would always "do" them!

Inspections of harness were frequent, and the standard of cleanliness and brilliancy required was a high one. The fine weather certainly lent itself to assist in the "turn outs," but, as always, harness takes a tremendous amount of work before a standard is reached which may even be termed "good." However, the batteries of the brigade received orders to move back towards

the line on May 31, and there were few in the battery who were not pleased to hear that their "spell" had come to an end.

The route taken on the return trip to the line was by way of the road on the south side of the river, through the village of Fontaine, the stopping place for the night being Hangest, a village on the opposite side of the river to Bourdon and several kilos. the other side of Longpré.

The second morning a start was made about 9 a.m., the new wagon lines which the battery were to occupy while in action being situated at Camon and near to the river. During the day the battery passed through the outskirts of Amiens, which some time previously had been evacuated by the civil population. The cathedral could be seen in the distance rising high above the surrounding buildings. Sentries were on all the bridges leading to the city, and it was evident that few, if any, were allowed to enter—making it all the more interesting, and quite a number made mental notes, passing, that the town would be worth a visit, even if the personal risks were rather on the high side. Almost daily Amiens was being shelled by one of the enemy's long-range guns, this being no clever feat, such as the shelling of Paris by "Big Bertha" with a range of about 70 miles. The nearest point to the line from Amiens would only be about 11 miles, and no great distance for heavy artillery.

## VILLERS-BRETONNEUX POSITION (BLANGY WOOD)

*From June 2, 1918, to July 16, 1918.*

During the morning of June 2 the guns were taken up to the position by the teams, the distance being considerable from the wagon lines. The position was a prepared one, the battery taking over from the 39th Battery of the 4th Australian Division, who, when relieved, made their way back to Coquèrel for their spell. The country and surroundings here for the most part were more picturesque than previous positions, the guns being dug in close to the opening which separated the Bois de Blangy in rear from the Bois l'Abbé in front. There were several dug-outs of the new tunnel type, which had been built some time previously by the French. For the first time, in the history of the battery at any rate, they were intermixed with French artillery and infantry. This was an insight into the French methods of carrying on the war, and conclusions were able to be drawn in comparing the French units with those of ours. The outcome of this residence with the French was a distinct friendship and a liking for them in spite of the language difficulty, and a genuine admiration of their fighting qualities. They seemed to strike a stranger in their midst who had not previously seen them in the line, with their look of determination. They were men who were up against the same enemy as ourselves, but in a far more desperate manner, seeing that they were either protecting or trying to win back their own homes and country, in which the Hun had caused so much havoc. This gave the French soldiers a grim appearance, and not so light-hearted, perhaps, as the men the battery had been in the habit of being amongst, and the Frenchman, seldom, if ever, "flash" in his appearance, with perhaps a partially grown beard on his face, always gave the impression that he meant business, and every individual among them seemed to be out to win the war, even at the expense of what others might think of him in dirty boots and decidedly rusty harness—the unforgivable sin of the British Army.

One of the outstanding features of the "Froggy" artillery was their dislike of being shelled, and their ready reply in answer, only with interest added. Should a hostile battery be putting any shells around in the neighbourhood of a 75-c.m. battery, if they were not firing at the time—and such a circumstance would be unlikely—only a few minutes would elapse before their battery would be spitting back shells like Lewis guns, and their "barking" would usually be kept up until the Fritz battery had "stood down," and considerably afterwards, so as to be sure that they were on the credit side of the balance.

Captain Rourke here left the battery as Liaison Officer attached to a French Divisional Headquarters, and one signaller

from the battery was also attached to the French Artillery Headquarters, situated close to the "Red House," and at the rear side of the Wood. The telephonist was responsible for the telephone line between French Group H.Q. and British D.A.H.Q., not always a simple matter during enemy shelling, and especially during the night time.

The six guns of the battery here in their position were not all in the same line—four guns only forming the main battery, the remaining section—the right section—being detached to a forward position, where, owing to their proximity to the lines and the certainty of being observed, the two guns remained silent, their only purpose being that of anti-tank guns, and, should that necessity ever arise, open sights with a direct lay would of course be used. The two forward guns here were handed over by the battery that the 27th relieved, as the change over took place in daylight and the forward guns could only be pulled out during the hours of darkness. The gun positions of the detached section were in the corner of a small orchard, and not far from the village of Cachy. One of the battery's O.P.'s was in a trench alongside these forward guns, the zero point used for ranging the guns being a monument—supposed to be one in memory of those who fell in the war of 1870—and which was situated to the right of Villers-Bretonneux, the houses of the town being visible from this point.

The detachments belonging to these forward guns for the most part had a good time for the six weeks that the battery remained in this position. The right section were in possession the greater part of the time, not being relieved until July 11, when the centre section changed over with them, remaining there for five days longer, when the battery were themselves relieved and moved to a new position on another sector. Apart from S.O.S. guard—the only actual duty they were responsible for—their time was taken up in digging or finishing off the excavating of a dug-out which was under construction when the position was taken over.

During the hours of darkness a G.S. wagon or a "pill box" was frequently sent up to the forward position to get a load of lucerne, of which there was an ample supply growing in the vicinity, and which considerably benefited the condition of the battery's horses at the wagon lines. The gunners of the detachment were frequently occupied during the day in cutting this lucerne ready for loading the wagon when it arrived after dusk. Their rations, of course, and water they had to fetch from the battery position daily, and, apart from occasional shelling, and one night in particular, when gas shells made the atmosphere pretty thick for a time and gas respirators had to be worn for about an hour, theirs was "quite a good lurk."

No attacks eventuated, and the forward guns were not required as it happened, but in all probability theirs would have been a "short life and a gay one" while it lasted, and it is to be hoped that in that short time their existence would have been justified.

An incident occurred while the section were up forward. The trenches in the rear of their position were occupied by French

Infantry in support, most of them being Territorial regiments, consisting of elderly men. The gunners of "A" and "B" Subs. to communicate with each other had to cross the intervening ground which ran along close to the front of the occupied trench. Being under direct observation from the enemy lines during daylight, the French Infantry took exception to this track being used, and occasionally remonstrated in their own language, being of opinion that the movement, if seen, was likely to draw fire. One new gunner was making his way along on one occasion, when he heard several of the Frenchmen call out to him, but not knowing what all the noise was about, held to his course. The next instant he was surprised to hear the report of a French rifle, and a bullet whistle close above his head. This method of explaining their dislikes was eminently satisfactory, although for a little while afterwards it looked as if a "box on" among the "Allies" was imminent!

The remainder of the battery in their position in the under-growth further inland was fairly well screened from observation, from the ground, at any rate, but the vicinity received a great amount of shelling from enemy batteries, and specially during the night hours.

Ammunition was required fairly frequently, and the teams were employed in carting from the D.A.C. dump near Glisy. A curious incident in connection with a shell-shocked rat occurred about this time.

One night after leaving the battery, having just completed unloading ammunition, a column of wagons was returning at a brisk rate in the direction of the wagon lines. The N.C.O. in charge, Bombardier I. C. Charlesworth, was detained at the battery for some minutes, and was therefore obliged to trot after the teams to catch up with the column. At the moment he approached the rear wagon his horse shied, and looking on the ground he was surprised to see that a rat was the cause of the horse's fright. However, he urged his horse forward and caught up with the battery team. On passing in rear of a French battery the column trotted to get by as speedily as possible, as Fritz was shelling the battery and the neighbourhood at that time. Some three miles further on, and when nearing the wagon lines, Bombardier Charlesworth had occasion to drop to the rear of the column, and to his surprise found the rat still running along and following the last vehicle!

Many uncomplimentary remarks were passed when the N.C.O. narrated this incident, but the rat's presence was vouched for by others who saw it at the same time.

The wagon lines had only remained on the Camon side of the railway line two nights, moving on June 3 to the lines on the other side of the embankment vacated by the 39th Battery, whom they relieved. Their situation was at the side of the deep railway cutting and close to the point where the trains in ordinary times branched off to Corbie and Albert, and to the right of Villers-Bretonneux and Péronne.

For the first week or so enemy batteries were lively in carrying out shoots—mainly intended for the railway line, which along this stretch was still being used by the French for taking up ammunition and supplies to one of their heavy guns which was in position in front of Glisy.

The enemy, of course, had an idea of its position, and the line around Glisy was at times freely shelled, but no shells ever burst anywhere near the position, which spoke well for the camouflage. This gun was afterwards removed, its destination being said to be Italy.

About this time a contagious disease broke out in the battery and was general amongst the troops. It was known officially, for the want of a real name, as P.U.O. (pain of unknown origin—or patient under observation), or N.Y.D. (not yet diagnosed) and known unofficially, and, with probably a more truthful diagnosis of the symptoms, as plain “dog’s disease.” It was not really a serious illness, but sufficient to make patients keep to their beds—(or their equivalent!) A special tarpaulin had to be erected to house the patients, and a good average attendance, and all with temperatures, was kept up for several weeks. While dealing with sick parades mention might be made here of an occurrence which took place while at Larkhill. A gunner was before the M.O. complaining of “pains everywhere,” when he was asked by the officer whether he would have gone to him in civil life had he been affected in the same way. His reply was in the negative, adding, “I would have gone and seen a *doctor*!” To the further question as to what he *was* in civil life, the “patient” replied, “A picture of happiness, sir!” The prescription for the trouble was somewhere in the neighbourhood of seven days’ Number One.

At this time a certain number of gunners who were not on the detachments at the guns, at frequent intervals had to report to Headquarters and go forward to dig a tunnel to be occupied at a later date by D.A.H.Q., and in the neighbourhood of Hamel.

At the wagon lines swimming races were held in the canal, which was only a short distance the other side of the railway cutting, and concerts were also arranged among the men of the Brigade which drew a large attendance.

Enemy bombing planes were active at night, and owing to the ideal weather conditions their visits were often prolonged and frequent. During the daytime Amiens was often shelled, and the report of the enemy gun and the subsequent singing of the shell overhead, with the explosion and echoes, more like a thunder-storm than one shell, could always be heard. At nighttime, and just as the sun was setting, as many as fifteen balloons could be seen ascending over the city, and although many tales were abroad as to their uses and how they radiated electrical waves, rendering the magnetoes of hostile aircraft useless, their more probable service was similar to those used over Paris, and which suspended nets for aeroplanes to run into.

Several of the adventurous spirits in the battery made their way into the city in daylight, the easiest method being by way of the canal. The stream being fairly fast there was no great diffi-

culty in obtaining a boat, and the rest was simple. By this means the vegetable supply of the battery, and individually the fruit supply, was increased, as at this time the Army rations were not as plentiful as they might be or even had been previously.

The 25th Battery ran a daily service down stream for a vegetable supply, and the boat was used in bringing it back. The 27th Battery were less organised, and after a few trips there was a shortage of boats, as everybody used the water as a means of getting there, with the stream, but the return journey was more often made by foot, in preference to a hard pull back in a flat-bottomed punt with "wonderful" oars—probably converted shovels or an old broom! This caused an accumulation of boats somewhere down stream and an excessive shortage at the starting point.

One night a party returned after a good evening in the village of Camon, which, by the way, was constantly being shelled at this time. After telling of some of their doings, and in the meantime handing round chocolates and lollies, one "hard case" told of a house they had entered through an open door at the back, which bore the words, "Danger de mort," and in one of the rooms they were horrified to find the dead body of a child only a year or two old. They afterwards explained that that was where they had found the lollies, and the look on those "munching" the remains of them can well be imagined!

Strawberries of enormous size and in great profusion were found in the riverside market gardens, and were an undisguised pleasure to many.

On June 14 the battery sustained the only casualties they suffered while in this position. Gunner G. G. Spencer and Driver L. George were killed, and Gunner G. W. Martin was seriously wounded. Driver George was acting as groom to Captain Moriarty at the time, and was waiting with his horses to take him back to the wagon lines, when the unhappy incident occurred. The horse Driver George was riding at the time, known as the "Tank," and originally brought from Larkhill with the battery by Mr. Neylan, was killed. Captain Moriarty's horse, formerly Captain Peart's when at Larkhill, and which had previously narrowly escaped extinction at Houplines, was wounded and broke away, never to be heard of again.

At the same time Gunners Spencer and Martin were hit by flying fragments, with the regrettable results already mentioned.

On July 3 a "messenger" dog was attached to the battery, being stationed at the O.P. as a trial. In the dog's army he would probably be of the rank of private or gunner, as the explicit orders which accompanied him were to the effect that he was to be ignored and in no way treated with kindness and, under no circumstances whatever, to be fed! The reason for this was of course self-evident, as the trainer fed the dog himself at Brigade Headquarters, that being the place to which the dog, when released, would naturally make for with the dispatch he carried with him. The same day an enemy plane was brought down in flames in front of the battery O.P.

The following day the stunt which regained Hamel—on the left of the battery's sector—was successful, the attack being on a front of approximately six miles and the advance being to a depth of about 2,000 yards. This loss to the enemy coincided with an American advance in the south in the neighbourhood of Rheims, being specially arranged to have good news for the American people on July 4, the anniversary of their independence. The same evening, about 9 o'clock, the enemy counter-attacked, but with no effects of a successful nature.

From this date onwards the activity of our artillery and that of the enemy increased, and particularly so at night. After the continued shelling of the area around the four guns of the battery, a section comprising two guns were detached to a flank some 500 yards to the right of their previous position, and here they were unmolested. Tunnels were dug here also for accommodation of more security, as only "bivvies" were permissible, cut into the side of the trench, and in which French Territorials were in reserve. Generally speaking, the guns of the battery were more scattered than at any other time in France, similar methods being adopted by the Germans very frequently with their own artillery, and, it is to be presumed, giving a greater margin of safety both to guns and men, although perhaps, at the same time, lessening the facilities of control.

At various times during the day bombardments would frequently be heard at varying distances from the battery's sector, and on July 12 an intense bombardment was audible about 4.30 a.m. in the direction of Montdidier.

Four days later—on July 16—the guns were handed over to a 2nd Australian Division battery, the wagon lines moving the same day via Blangy Tronville to Dacours, where the lines of a 4th Australian Division battery were taken over, their guns in a position above Fouilloy being manned by the 27th Battery.

## THE CHALK PIT (FOUILLOY) POSITION.

*From July 16, 1918, to July 24, 1918.*

## AND FORWARD POSITION.

*From July 24, 1918, to August 7, 1918.*

This position was situated on the high ground on the side of the road leading from Villers-Bretonneux to Fouilloy. The guns were on the higher side of a big chalk pit, and the dug-outs and bivvies were in the chalk pit itself, with abundant cover from enemy shell fire.

For two or three days only forward limber lines were established on top of the railway cutting, and close to the bridge on the roadway connecting Aubigny and Daours. Sergeant Barclay was in charge of these lines, and while they were in operation, owing to rain, shells, and shell gas and little protection from the elements, the conditions were none too good. A lamp signal station was worked from the battery to these forward limber lines, and communication thence to the rear wagon lines was by means of the telephone. The first night after taking over the position was memorable for the quantity of gas on the roads leading to the position, and many had difficulties in making their way to and fro along the roads.

The rear wagon lines were in the château grounds on the outskirts of the village of Daours, and were comparatively comfortable.

While in these wagon lines a number of gunners, and also permanent personnel of the wagon line (more often referred to as "spare parts"), were put through a Lewis gunner's course at a school which was conducted at D.A.C.H.Q. It was said at the time that during the retreat in the month of March previous, heavy casualties had been inflicted upon the Field Artillery by low-flying hostile planes which "machine-gunned" the different batteries' wagon lines, putting out of action a large percentage of their horses, in addition to causing casualties among the drivers, and thus increasing greatly the difficulty of getting the guns pulled back to new positions, and cutting off at the commencement of the attack the great assistance Field Artillery should render to the infantry. So at this time, when plans for the great attack which was to open early the following month, were doubtless already formulated, this school was in operation to ensure that batteries would have a sufficient number of men, other than drivers or gunners, to work a machine gun, and so that wagon lines would have their own means of defence against hostile planes.

At Daours itself not many bombs were dropped, but in the direction of Pout Noyelles and the districts around Blangy Tronville a considerable amount of damage was done, and in one battery of the 8th Artillery Brigade many horses on one occasion were killed and wounded, totalling about 50 in all in the one battery.

Ammunition was needed at the battery on frequent occasions, and a D.A.C. dump was established in the trees on the main road outside the château, and known as "Vecquemont Dump." Gunners were also detailed as working parties on a dug-out above Fouilloy for the use of Brigade Headquarters. It was considered a good job to be detailed for at the time, as the numbers sent up were usually far in excess of the actual number required to do the work, and consequently proved to be somewhat of a holiday.

On July 24 the guns once again moved forward—a matter of a thousand yards. The same night the wagons did three trips, carting ammunition to the new position. While at this position nothing worthy of note occurred, although activity on both sides increased, and on occasions the shelling was considerable. An O.P. used by the brigade at this position was at a spot almost identical to that used previously by the battery in April, 1918, being situated on the front side of Welcome Wood, above the village of Vaux-sur-Somme; for the purpose of getting there horses for the officer and signallers were sent up once in four days from the wagon lines to the battery.

On August 6 two sections of the battery were taken forward to a special position, and only about one thousand yards to the rear of Hamel. The right section remained in the old position until 11.30 p.m. on August 7, firing up to the minute they pulled forward.

Elaborate precautions were taken to prevent the enemy from obtaining knowledge of the stunt in preparation. Wagons required to take up ammunition had the chains, and anything liable to rattle, bound round with flannel, the wheels being bound with straw and held on by wires to prevent any noise on a hard road. This proved hardly a success, as the weight of the wagon on the metal tyres soon cut through the wire. All drivers had strict injunctions not to smoke or speak above a whisper, and some of the men wondered whether it was to be their privilege to cart "ammo" to a dump behind Fritz's own line!

However, everything was carried out successfully, and in the meantime, although for the most part the roads were not abnormally crowded in the daytime, by night they bore a different aspect. Under cover of the darkness, from evening until dawn, from Saturday night, August 3, and during the daytime, when bad visibility permitted, a constant stream of traffic of every description thronged the roads leading in the direction of the line. There were innumerable tanks and whippets, huge motor tractors with a string of "heavies" behind them, horse artillery, field artillery, and an unending stream of motor lorries, all carting

ammunition to forward dumps as if their lives depended upon it. After months of comparative inactivity in the way of prepared stunts, other than mere raids and stagnant warfare, it acted as a tonic to everybody to see that a push on a big scale was in contemplation on the Australian sectors.

At various points along the line on which the attack had been planned to take place, local operations had been successfully carried out during the days previous to the date of the big attack, mainly for the purpose of securing positions of vantage for the jump-off. In this connection trenches in the neighbourhood of Morlencourt were captured and consolidated on July 28. The weather during the days immediately preceding August 8 was in the Allies' favour, being overcast most of the time, and so concealing the movement behind our lines.

## AUGUST 8, 1918.

By nightfall on August 7 all units had their instructions, and the necessary arrangements had been made for carrying them out. The Order of the Day issued by Lieut.-Gen. Sir John Monash, the Australian Commander, ran as follows:—

Soldiers of Australia!—For the first time in history all the Australian divisions will to-morrow engage in the largest and most important battle operation ever undertaken by an Australian force. They will be supported by powerful artillery, tanks, and aeroplanes. Our sister Dominion, Canada, will also operate, while the British Isles divisions will guard our left flank. The many successful offensives which you have so brilliantly executed in the past four months have been but a prelude to this—the greatest and culminating effort.

Owing to the completeness of the plans, the disposition, the magnitude of the operations, the depths to which we intend to overrun the enemy's position, the battle will be one of the most memorable in the whole war. There is no doubt that the capture of our objectives will inflict blows which will make the enemy stagger and bring the end appreciably nearer. I entertain no sort of doubt that every Australian soldier will worthily rise to the great occasion, and, imbued by the spirit of Victory, despite every difficulty that may confront him, and animated by no other resolve than a grim determination, will see through to a clean finish whatever task is allotted to him.

Work will be done to-morrow which, perhaps, will make heavy demands upon your endurance and staying powers; but I am confident that, despite excitement, fatigue, and physical strain, every man will carry on with his utmost powers until the goal is won. Men, it is for Australia, the Empire, and our cause. I earnestly wish every soldier the best of good fortune and a glorious decisive victory, the story of which will re-echo throughout the world and live for ever in the history of the homeland.

The right section—the last to leave the old position, and accordingly the last to get settled in the "stunt possey"—had a particularly hard night, although nobody's task was a light one by any means, but owing to their late arrival they had only an hour's rest before the opening of the barrage at 4.20 a.m. the following morning.

At the wagon lines back at Daours, *reveillé* was sounded at 2 a.m., and breakfast was an hour later. Guides had been detailed to leave the wagon lines mounted and with feeds for their horses at 4.20 a.m. and 5.20 a.m., with orders to report at the battery, but not before 6.35 a.m. and 7.50 a.m. respectively, their evident duties being to act as gallopers and keep in touch with battery

and wagons. These latter were due to leave the old lines about 4 a.m., and thence, by way of Aubigny, Fouilloy, Hamelet, and Vaire-sous-Corbie, to arrive at the guns at a pre-arranged hour, ready with ammunition to take the guns forward to a new position on ground captured by the infantry that morning, and dependent upon the degree of success of the attack.

At the appointed hour the barrage opened with a burst of deafening intensity, at the same time lighting up the sky with countless flashes, it still being dark at this hour, although the first signs of dawn were visible soon afterwards. In rear of the wagon lines, on a broad-gauge railway line, was a 12-in. naval monster, with its nose poking directly over the hedge bounding the camp. It opened fire at the same hour as the barrage and continued at intervals, each round nearly blowing half the battery's horses off their picket lines with the concussion. It was comforting, however, to think of the Fritzes miles back, who would be flattening themselves out on the ground when they heard one of these coming in their direction!

The battery wagons were in column of route at their appointed hour and on the road to the battery, in company with many others—field artillery and some heavy batteries—who found themselves with the same object in view. This made a continual stream of traffic in the one direction, whilst coming away from the line were walking wounded, with smiles all over them at the possibility of a nice Blighty and the certainty, at any rate, of a few days' freedom from the hell that had broken loose a few hours previously, and out of which they had just escaped. Amongst the traffic in the opposite direction were mingled Hun prisoners, some slightly wounded, but all looking passably contented with their lot; some bore a dogged appearance, giving the impression that they felt it was all in the day's work; but probably they had been taken so much by surprise that they scarcely had had time to realise what had actually overtaken them.

The battery's guns were in an entirely open position, and when the limbers and wagons arrived at the intersection of the Villers Bretonneux-Vaire-sous-Corbie Road and the track leading from Hamelet, where the guns were firing, the last few rounds in the barrage were being put over before standing down. This meant that the infantry's advance was successful, and instead of being only one thousand yards from the line, the retiring enemy was now out of range and probably was more than 7,000 yards away. After a wait of about half an hour the guns were limbered up and the battery as a whole prepared to move forward. The other batteries of the brigade had received similar orders, and they also were in readiness to go ahead.

In the meantime, the traffic on the track leading from Hamel and the line was crowded with similar sights to those often described elsewhere and the natural consequences in an up-to-date "stunt." Tanks were well represented by fresh "brigades" going in for the next "hop over," and by one or two still under their own power, but which had been more or less badly "stung"

and might be classed as "walking wounded." Small motor ambulances, going empty in one direction and very full in the other, with nothing but the soles of the wearers' boots showing. Horse ambulances were also in use. Infantry pack mules with ammunition for machine guns and rifles also picked their way in the crowd, while fresh infantry battalions marched in single file to their forward positions, where they would go through and carry on the advance after other infantry had reached their objectives.

Up to this time hostile fire had been practically nil, but by now the enemy had evidently so far recovered from the initial severity of the shock, and necessary consequent disorganisation, to commence shelling the roads and tracks which he knew well enough would be blocked with traffic going forward to take up new positions.

Other batteries of the brigade were immediately ahead of the 27th, and, while passing the wood on the slope below Hamel, an enemy battery put several well-placed rounds right alongside the stream of horses and vehicles, and casualties were seen to be inflicted. It looked as if the battery were in for a rough time, but, as luck would have it, the whole length of the battery safely passed the stretch being shelled. At the bottom of the hill, and not far from the river bank, the 26th Battery, with their grey horses, were halted, but the 27th continued on and up the hill, and still shells—mostly 4.2's—were unpleasantly close. Had the visibility during the early hours of the morning been clearer, there would most certainly have been a different tale to tell, as all the high ground over which advancing batteries had to move would have been under direct observation, and the enemy batteries would then have been able to observe the firing of their guns and make what corrections were necessary. It was distinctly a matter for congratulation that there was still a thin mist on the ground level until the sun was high in the sky, but by that time new positions had been taken up and, except by aircraft, their discovery was most improbable.

At the top of the hill the battery left the track leading to the cross roads above Gailly and, turning to the right, made across the open paddock now well behind the Hun's old front line, which he had maintained until the barrage and infantry attack of that morning had driven him back.

Reaching the deep gully on the other side, now a moving mass of horses, wagons, guns and men, but all going forward, the battery was halted while the Battery Commander and his party, of signallers went forward to pick out the new position, lay out the new lines of fire, and get into communication with Brigade Headquarters. In this gully a great number of guns, mostly "whizzbangs," had either been knocked out by our fire or abandoned by their gunners, some of whom had perhaps escaped altogether, but the greater number, if not wounded or killed, had been taken prisoner. The searching thoroughness of our barrage and covering fire was here visible, many German dead were to be seen where they had fallen, and, in addition, German G.S. wagons with their teams dead, Minenwerfers attached to wagons,

probably in an attempt to get them back, but of no avail, all showed the swiftness of our attack and how unexpected it was by the enemy.

The new position taken up was to the south of Morcourt and close to a clump of trees which previously sheltered the guns of a whizzbang battery (Field Artillery Regt. No. 58, III. Brigade, 8th Battery), which had been firing at us until only an hour or so previously. All the guns were in good condition and were in "dug in" pits, with the usual camouflage covering. One gun had been run forward out of its pit, and had been used on targets which presented themselves on the rising ground in front, the number of empty cartridge cases proving that a good number of rounds had been fired and probably at some of our tanks or advancing infantry. There were a number of dead gunners near by, and one wounded German, who had evidently been missed by the A.M.C., hidden as he was in the undergrowth. His wound was a serious one and he died later.

For the rest of the day little or no shooting was done by the battery; forward limber lines were established in the gully where the halt in the morning had been made. This day there was a shortage of rations; at the battery there was nothing forthcoming until the evening, but the forward wagon lines were less fortunate, as no food of any kind was obtainable until 9 o'clock the following morning.

At 10 a.m. on the morning of August 9, the battery was relieved, and consequently pulled out, the only casualty that had occurred was Gunner T. Holmes, who was wounded in the arm during the opening barrage by a premature burst from a round fired by a heavy battery in rear.

Thus closed the first day of the attack which, in reality, was the beginning of the end, as scarcely a day passed following the "Eighth" which was not heralded by a barrage covering an attack by the infantry.

From Corbie to Bazuel (near Valenciennes) the battery followed the retreating Hun, and, with the exception of one or two short spells, were in action until the end of October.

About mid-day on August 9 the battery arrived at a paddock in front of Vaire-sous-Corbie, which was to be used as brigade wagon lines for twenty-four hours, and here they settled down to get a much-needed rest in the time at their disposal. During the afternoon a heavy bombardment was audible and visible in the direction of Mallard Wood, on the opposite side of the river. Rumours had been prevalent during the day that American and English Divisions on the left of the "Aussie" Infantry had been in trouble, and on their account the advance was temporarily held up, and especially so at Mallard Wood. The 58th English Division, as did the Yanks, suffered heavily, and it was on this account that on the following morning the battery had orders to be in readiness to move out at a moment's notice. From mid-day until 5 p.m. everybody was packed up and harnessed ready to move, but the actual order did not come through until that hour.

## MORCOURT.

*From August 10, to August 12, 1918.*

By way of Hamel, and by passing the position of the previous day, leading straight on, a deep gully was reached in the neighbourhood of Morcourt. The high ground in rear being under direct enemy observation, the battery was brought through at the gallop. Several enemy planes were flying round at the time, and the batteries pulling in must have made an interesting sight. While all the teams were assembled several shells fell almost in their midst in the crowded gully, but wonderfully enough nobody was hurt.

The gully itself was an interesting place, and any number of souvenirs of its late occupants were there. Right alongside the battery, in undergrowth, was a whizz-bang battery with a huge quantity of ammunition still unfired and captured on August 8 by the 14th Battalion, A.I.F. On the opposite side of the gully in a wood were several 8-in. guns, also captured on the same day, and still standing in their pits undamaged. There were also several 5.9's, and all of these that could be turned round were so turned, and the Hun's own ammunition, which he had no time to fire off before he hurriedly "got for his life," or was enveloped by our infantry, was carried by willing helpers alongside the guns, and with the limit range many rounds of his own gas and H.E. were "pumped over" into his own lines right throughout the day. Considerable care had to be taken when firing the first shot out of a captured gun, as although looking quite innocent in itself, many had been tampered with and rendered useless. Some had the oil buffers empty, so that, on being fired there would be nothing to overcome the recoil. For the first shot a lanyard, yards long, was often used, and everybody near by took cover. One 5.9-in. worked by "spare numbers" from the 27th Battery "pooped over" hundreds of rounds during the day, the gunners at the finish being covered in oil and grease, with black faces and such a smile of satisfaction at the thought of their day's work.

From letters found in the pits of the whizz-bang battery alongside the 27th guns, it appeared to be the 5th Battery, 2nd Brigade, of the 43rd Reserve Field Artillery Regiment. From a roster found there also, April 9 was a busy day for this battery—a bad day of heavy shelling for the 27th while at the Heilly position—and one gun of this battery alone fired 200 gas shells and 250 rounds of H.E.!

While in action here forward wagon lines were established in the gully immediately below the guns, the drivers' bivvies being dug into the side of the bank. Little sleep was possible the first night; it was late when everyone got settled, and twilight

had scarcely changed to semi-darkness when the drone of Fritz's bombers could be heard in the distance. The gully seemed to be well known to him, as time and again his planes made a bee-line for the spot, and unloaded their bombs on all sides in the wood opposite, and as luck would have it everywhere but on top of the battery. After midnight he commenced shelling the gully and its surroundings, and there were few moments of quiet during the whole night. With the exception of flesh wounds on some of the horses the battery sustained no injuries, but other batteries in the same gully were less fortunate.

The next night also—August 11—is memorable for the activity of enemy planes. In addition to the bright moonlight, which was of great assistance for picking up objects on the ground, this particular night he used a number of parachute lights which the leading plane fired, so that by the time the main body of planes arrived, the lights would have floated sufficiently near to the ground to light up almost every irregularity. These brilliant lights each lasted for several moments, and everyone caught in the open—the surroundings being lit up unexpectedly—often had an anxious time wondering whether they had been spotted, and whether the bomb was already on its way.

On Sunday, August 11, the battery fired a barrage shoot at 8.15 p.m., just before dusk, to cover an infantry attack in the neighbourhood of Chipilly. The barrage opened with a range of 3,675 yards, each gun firing two rounds per minute and lifting 100 yards every three minutes up to a range of 4,175 yards, after which the lifts of 100 yards were made every four minutes up to 4,875 yards. The battery would, therefore, fire about 470 rounds to cover an advance of about 1,000 yards, the barrage lasting approximately forty-five minutes.

On the following day an English division were due to take over the battery's position at mid-day, but they did not put in an appearance until shortly before midnight, and the change over had to take place to the tune of Fritz's bombers overhead, the battery arriving at wagon lines alongside the river at Hamelet about 3.0 a.m. on the morning of August 13.

## THE TRIP TO ROSIÈRES.

*From August 13 to August 16, 1918.*

Four hours later *reveillé* sounded at 7 a.m., everyone preparing to move off at 10.30 a.m. for another unknown destination. The exact reason for a change of sectors was never known, but it entailed a long march and a lot of carting of ammunition to a position a great distance from wagon lines, and at the last moment all the preparations were cancelled, the stunt evidently being postponed. It was supposed at the time that the enemy had retired to a considerable depth, evidently getting wind of the preparations and going back in time to frustrate and upset the plans made for our attack.

At 9.0 a.m. the "B.C.'s" party left the wagon lines, the battery following shortly afterwards.

Outside Marcelcave a number of "whippet" tanks were "kennelled." The traffic on the roads at this time was enormous—one continual stream was in motion, and the loose surface churned up by countless horses' feet floated with the breeze above the riders' heads and hung on either side of the roadway. Just west of the village of Cayeux-en-Santerre the battery halted and wagon lines were formed alongside the marshy ground which borders the River Luce at this spot.

The advance party, in company with similar parties from other batteries of the brigade, had proceeded on through Cayeux, some 10 kilometres, if not more, through Caix to Rosières, where they were met by Colonel King. Between Caix and Rosières a number of our cavalry horses were to be seen, evidently having been killed in the advance. Around this district little of any value appears to have been relinquished by the retreating Hun, which seemed to show that after recovering from the attack of the first couple of days, and in which he was taken entirely by surprise, and on that account lost heavily in men and guns, he was now making an orderly retreat and without losing a great deal of valuable war stores. The horses of the advance party were left in Rosières, and battery commanders then went on foot in the direction of Méharicourt in company with Colonel King to view their respective positions, which the batteries were to take up a couple of nights later in readiness for the stunt, preparations for which were then in progress.

The same evening the D.A.C. carted hundreds of rounds from the dump in Caix to the other side of Rosières, and in spite of bombs on the roads and, at times, heavy shelling of the town of Rosières by heavy enemy batteries, they delivered the "goods" and returned without accident to their lines, but not before the first

light of dawn was making its appearance. The same night the battery wagons carted a full échelon to the position to be occupied later. After only a few hours' sleep during the preceding nights, and days of continued movement, many of the men were showing signs of fatigue, these being long days of hard work, the nights seldom bringing with them the rest that was so badly needed.

The next day was spent in the wagon lines, and more ammunition was carted to the position that night, but at the last moment, and just in time to stop the wagons unloading, orders were received to return to the wagon lines with the ammunition. On the return journey, while close to a heavy battery, and while the column was halted owing to the traffic on the road, several bombs fell close by, wounding Gunner E. Drinkwater, who was on one of the wagons at the time. The same night Gunner C. H. Rose had his arm broken, due to an accident, and both were evacuated to hospital and neither returned to the battery.

The following day, August 15, the 4th Hussars and the 16th Lancers passed by the wagon lines on their way to the rear, their work for the present evidently being completed.

The same night an enemy battery shelled the wagon lines, putting over about 50 rounds before daylight. The 27th Battery were a little off the line of fire, but several occupants of bivvies had to move temporarily to a safer place.

The following day orders were received at 2 p.m. for a hurried move an hour later, and at the same time a mounted orderly was despatched to the position to which ammunition had been carted, some 8 kilometres distant, to recall the men guarding the ammunition. Fortunately the guns had not been installed in their pits, and so all the preparations came to no purpose. That night the batteries of the brigade formed wagon lines just on the outskirts of Fouilloy, and remained there resting for the three days following.

A Y.M.C.A. tent was erected and one or two concerts were held during the evenings, and the canteen also was open for business, but owing to the many difficulties of obtaining supplies, purchases were limited.

On Sunday, August 18, the first fruits of the recent advance were to be seen, the Boche having been pushed back a sufficient distance to allow of a service being held in Amiens Cathedral—the first since the great set back in the previous month of March.

The same day Mr. E. J. Pope left the battery to take up duties as A.D.C. to General Rosenthal. Captain G. V. Moriarty also took command of the battery, owing to Major Doherty's evacuation to hospital.

## MALARD WOOD.

*From August 20, to August 24, 1918.*

At 8.45 a.m. on the morning of August 20 the advance party consisting of the B.C.'s and R.O.'s parties, moved out from wagon lines, followed at 1 p.m. by the battery in column of route. By way of Corbie and the lower road along the northern bank of the river, leading through the villages of Vaux-sur-Somme and Sailly-le-Sec, the column marched to a gully on the outskirts of the village of Sailly Laurette and established wagon lines there. Close to this gully and in rear the Huns' front line had been situated for several months, and this neighbourhood had been the scene of heavy fighting when the Huns' advance had been stemmed there in the month of March. Now the surroundings were little better than could be expected of a No Man's Land, and the two villages on either side of the old line—Sailly Laurette and Sailly-le-Sec—could boast of few houses still standing, both being in close proximity to the front line, and, even at this time, Sailly Laurette was still being pounded on occasions by an enemy battery, and especially the cross roads by the church, where the roads branched to Morlencourt, the other leading straight on towards Chipilly. At night also enemy bombers knew all the occupied areas, and, with his latest device of supplying his own "moon-light" with parachute flares, his planes were busy during most of the hours of darkness.

In the morning the advance party had proceeded straight to Sailly Laurette and had turned up the Morlencourt Road to the top of the hill, from thence trotting over the open ground to the top of the gully surrounding Mälard Wood. There the Battery Commanders had gone forward on foot to pick out their respective positions, returning later to the wagon lines when all details had been arranged. It was at this gully, the high steep sides of which were thickly wooded, that the Americans and troops of the 58th English Division met with such stiff opposition in the first days of the advance.

That night and the next morning full échelons of ammunition were taken up to the spot the guns were to occupy. Lines of fire were laid out during the day by Captain Moriarty and Mr. Slade, and the guns went up into position at 8.45 p.m. that night.

This position was actually situated in a paddock about 500 yards in front of the road leading from Chipilly to Morlencourt, and not far south of the main Bray-Corbie Road. In rear and to the north of the battery were the remains of aeroplane hangars, of which only the iron structures now remained.

On the morning of August 22, the battery were engaged in firing the barrage, the infantry attack opening at 4.45 a.m., and in the meantime reveillé at the wagon lines had been sounded at 4 a.m., preparatory to moving forward at 6 a.m. to a rendezvous in the deep gully adjacent to Malard Wood. The roar of the

barrage was continuous until about ten o'clock in the morning, when it moderated, and all was quiet after that hour. An order was expected for the gun limbers to proceed to the battery to take the guns forward after firing the barrage, but this did not come through until 1 p.m., and after proceeding to the guns the order to move the guns was cancelled. It seemed that everything had not gone quite as was expected or hoped for on the left of the battery's sector, as, in spite of a successful advance in the morning, in the counter-attack which had followed a certain portion of the gains had been lost. This set-back necessitated the carting of a further 1,200 rounds to the battery, and it was even hinted at that it might be necessary for the guns to retire a certain distance. Evidently the Huns were putting up a strong resistance, and for the moment the outlook did not look too promising.

At 7 p.m. that evening there was a general "stand to" at the guns, and even the "heavies," including the 9.2-in's were at "gun fire." This, however, seemed effective, for the teams and wagons, including the gun limbers, had orders to hook-in and move back to their previous wagon lines at Sailly Laurette about 8.30 p.m.

While carting ammunition to the battery, Gunner A. K. MacDougall was slightly wounded and was evacuated. That night in the gully and elsewhere bombing planes were very active, and while the teams were waiting for the order to move off one or two enemy planes were persistent in the use of their machine-guns in the gully, but luckily they did no damage whatever. On returning to the wagon lines, planes during the night were continually flying overhead, and many bombs burst in the immediate neighbourhood. Higher up the gully horses were killed; and in Sailly Laurette, as the columns were on their way home, the wounded survivors of a bivvy were being removed to hospital, two of their number being killed a few moments previously.

That night at the battery a number of whizz-bang bursts were unpleasantly close to some of the dug-outs. Early the next morning (August 23, 1918) the barrage that opened was replied to strongly by the enemy, and as far back as the wagon lines at Sailly Laurette and on the Bray-Corbie road heavy shelling by enemy batteries was everywhere experienced.

Ammunition was being carted to the battery day and night, and a great deal of firing was necessary. German prisoners in batches could be seen marching to the rear on the distant slopes on the opposite side of the river. Later in the day it was heard that an advance had been made towards Bray.

On August 24 a heavy barrage opened at 1 a.m., and it was afterwards heard that the town of Bray had been taken, the 40th Battalion taking a conspicuous part. During the previous night "E" and "F" Sub's guns went forward to a position about a thousand yards ahead, and about midday the other four guns of the battery moved forward also.

This position was only occupied a short time, as eighteen hours later a further move forward was necessary.

## ETINEHEM AND BRAY POSITIONS.

*From August 25, 1918, to August 27, 1918.*

On August 25 another barrage covering the attack by our infantry opened at 2.20 a.m. For this reason *réveillé* at the wagon lines was sounded at 1 a.m., and a couple of hours later gun limbers and wagon teams moved out in a thick early morning fog, making for the place of rendezvous, which was the gully adjacent to Malard Wood. The teams arrived there by 4 a.m., and shortly afterwards proceeded to the B.P., and within the next two hours, after a little difficulty in locating the guns on account of the fog, guns and all were once again advancing.

On reaching the Etinehem-Bray Road they proceeded a hundred yards or so in the direction of Bray, and then entered a paddock on the right of the road, where an attempt was made to lay out the lines of fire, but this was attended by difficulties owing to the dense mist which was still hanging over the ground.

About 11 a.m. the battery had orders to go forward once again, and, consequently, hooked in without having fired any shots from this position. By then the mist had cleared, and while climbing the hill several shells burst in close proximity to the road and ahead of the column, and it looked very much as if the battery had been spotted by an enemy observation balloon which was visible at no great distance. However, breaking into a trot the column got safely through, and on reaching the Crucifix at the summit the town of Bray-sur-Somme was visible on the down slopes of the hill, and no time was wasted in making the open paddocks on the other side of the town. The town itself was soaked with shell gas, and shells were lobbing in some of the streets, the main cross-roads receiving particular attention.

The next position picked out for the guns was about 500 yards on the far side of the town and on the rising ground above the railway line. By 2 p.m. the guns were in action with a range of about 3,000 yards, and all the teams had returned to wagon lines which were established in the village of Etinehem. By 4 o'clock in the afternoon those at the wagon lines had managed to have a meal, it being just twenty-three hours since the last bite—tea the previous day—and not long afterwards most of the men took the opportunity of having a much-needed rest and sleep.

The following morning news was received unofficially that the Huns had retired some 2,000 yards and the village of Suzanne had been occupied by our infantry. In a wood in front of the battery about 100 prisoners, in addition, had been taken.

The afternoon was an unfortunate one for the 27th Battery, Driver L. L. Wilkinson losing his life while acting as centre driver on "B" Sub's team, which, in company with others, was taking up ammunition to the guns. In addition, Drivers H. Baldwin and W. L. Slater were more or less seriously wounded, and Gunner K. T. Healy, who was on one of the wagons, was also struck by fragments, and was evacuated to hospital. Four of "B" Sub's horses were killed, and the wonder is more destruction was not caused in the general confusion. The scene of the shelling was on the metal road near where the battery was brought into action the previous morning in the fog, but higher up the hill and nearer the Crucifix which stood at the summit above Bray.

The 26th Battery were returning from a trip to their guns, and shells were then bursting close at hand, and the shell causing the casualties burst practically on the roadway and almost alongside "B" Sub's team. It seems almost certain that the enemy balloon which was observing at the time had picked out the teams and was directing the fire, as visibility was good, and movement on this road would be plainly discernible to a watchful enemy. Driver Wilkinson's body was buried in Etinehem cemetery, not far from the village, the following day, August 27.

During the morning of August 27 the gun limbers took the guns forward to a position some distance to the left of the village of Suzanne (Q 2.b.3030). The track followed to reach this position was by way of a deep gully, the steep sides of which were clothed with trees, and had concealed wagon lines and stables, and on passing through many of the enemy's dead horses were to be seen. At 2 p.m. the same day the wagon lines moved forward from Etinehem to a new camp within a hundred yards or so of the battery position vacated that morning. Before midnight 1,100 rounds had to be carted to the position in readiness for the morning barrage, which by this time was a daily occurrence, and during the afternoon the enemy batteries were considerably active on both areas in their endeavour to hamper the traffic on the roads and to render the bringing up of supplies more difficult. The enemy, knowing well the only places fit for watering horses at the river, frequently shelled these places at the time when he knew lines of horses would be filing down to water, and some of these shells bursting in the river sent volumes of water and spray feet high into the air. Crucifix Corner behind Bray again this afternoon was heavily strafed, and it was fortunate the wagons chose the lower road alongside the river in moving forward to the wagon lines.

About this time Headquarters wagon lines suffered slight casualties among horses and men owing to a "booby trap" in the way of a small mine left in the lines occupied by the horses. Great care had to be taken in entering dugouts recently occupied by the enemy, as all kinds of devices were employed to render them dangerous to the subsequent occupiers. Set mines to explode at a certain time and also contact mines were frequently in evidence. In Bray mines were being sprung at frequent intervals. The report

of the explosion and a small cloud of smoke and brick dust was the only intimation that anything had happened, and "souvenir kings" had to be wary lest their enthusiasm led them into trouble.

After the rain which fell in the afternoon thirteen of our observation balloons could be counted in the neighbourhood making the best use of the good visibility which followed.

On August 28 the drivers at the wagon lines were roused out at 4.45 a.m., and the B.C.'s party preceded them to the guns. At 8 a.m. the guns were limbered up, and a further advance was made through the village of Suzanne to a position on the far side of the village. Enemy batteries evidently being out of action for the time being—probably being fully employed pulling back to new positions—the advance was carried out in comparative quietness.

## SUZANNE TO CLERY.

*From August 28, 1918, to September 4, 1918.*

The trails here were dropped and the guns made ready for action in an open space just in front of a small wood known as "Murray Wood," and situated on the high ground about 500 yards above the village itself.

The zero line laid out was 77° right of Magnetic North, 2,400 yards being the minimum range to clear the crest in front. The firing battery wagons were left alongside the guns in this instance for the supply of ammunition.

Many old trenches were in this neighbourhood, the country that was now being approached being that of the scene of the fighting previous to the Somme offensive of 1916.

By 11 a.m. the drivers of the teams were back at the wagon lines, and breakfast was eagerly partaken. After a short rest and dinner the horses were watered at 3.30 p.m., and all gear was again packed up and wagon lines moved forward to a camping ground near the river and in rear of the village of Suzanne. The surroundings were well timbered, and on account of the attention of an enemy 4.2-in. battery which lobbed six shells in quick succession almost on top of the end of the column a few moments after their arrival, and two of the battery being evacuated with shell-shock shortly afterwards the place was usually referred to as "Shell-shock Gully." Quartermaster-Sergeant C. A. Slater and Driver A. Heron both went to hospital, returning to the battery some weeks later.

During the afternoon and about 9 p.m. that evening an extraordinarily heavy bombardment was audible, and news of more than ordinary importance was expected the following morning. This was, of course, forthcoming, as of the usual "well-founded" rumours—sometimes most original—the best favourite was that Peronne had been taken. This, however, was afterwards denied and the name of the village of Cléry substituted. It was stated that the 2nd Division Infantry, had crossed from the south side of the river and had captured the ground where once this village had stood.

About midday orders were received to pack up and move forward once more. With the guns hooked in, the open ground in front of the old position was traversed at the trot. After descending the steep slope near Vaux Wood the river level in the valley below was reached, and by way of the heap of bricks, mostly now grass-grown and known by the name of the village of Cury, the next position was arrived at.

The guns here were only a hundred yards or so from the roadway, a small stone quarry intervening. Four guns only went

into action on arrival, the orders being for one section to be detached under the command of Mr. Windeyer for special work, and attached for the time being to an Infantry Brigade Headquarters. The guns of the Right Section, to which the Centre Section teams were hooked in, were detailed for the work, but the order was afterwards cancelled, and the guns were taken into position alongside the rest of the battery. During the afternoon Driver S. R. McLaren, of "C" Sub's team, was wounded, but not severely.

The wagon lines were established close to wooden stables previously occupied by Fritz's horses and only a few hundred yards from the guns, and for a while shell-fire on the roads was heavy.

The bodies of two German machine-gunners and a Medical Corps orderly, named Siegfried, who hailed from Berlin, were near by, and were buried the following morning by Austrian prisoners in the cemetery close handy.

On the morning of August 30 the guns were once more moving forward by 8 a.m., and after crossing the railway which connected Combles with Peronne, and now was rendered useless by the enemy until repaired, a position was occupied next to Howitzer Wood and about midway between the two villages of Hem and Cléry, and still adjacent to the Cléry Road.

By 10.30 a.m. the guns were in action, the zero line being laid out on a Mag Bearing of 104°. About the same time the wagon lines moved forward to a spot just in front of Hem and alongside the marshes of the river so as to be handy for watering the horses. It was fortunate they chose the lower road, as the Cléry Road by this time was being made almost unusable by enemy batteries, any traffic that was forced to use the road being chased by shells for a long stretch, most of the vehicles covering the distance at a wild gallop. From this time onward the increase in shell-fire was noticeable, it being the Boche's evident intention to make a bold stand for the heights of Mont St. Quentin dominating Peronne on its south.

At the new wagon lines just after the teams had settled down a 6-in. howitzer battery pulled in and prepared their guns for action. The muzzle of Number One gun was pointing almost immediately over the top of the battery cook's "selection," and the first round nearly spoiled the dixies of midday tea. An argument followed in which it was decided that the carrying on of the war was of prime importance—although this was not unanimous—so the 6-in. battery did *not* move, but the cook's gear had to!

On the morning of August 30, Mr. A. E. Symes, accompanied by a telephonist, Gunner T. H. Burrett, went forward to the ridge on the left of Cléry for observation and to pick up targets.

Shell fire at the time was exceptionally heavy and great difficulties had to be overcome to maintain communication by telephone with the battery, and for his good work on this occasion Gunner Burrett was awarded the Military Medal.

The railway crossing was the main object upon which Fritz spent his wrath for many hours, 5.9's being much in evidence, and the neighbourhood was thick with flying splinters and was avoided as much as possible. A number of casualties, however, occurred there, but, fortunately, none of the battery. Close by six R.F.A. horses were killed, and many of their drivers had close calls. During the afternoon Sergeant A. S. Pennington—to use the vernacular—"dragged his second issue," and was returned to "Blighty" in consequence.

The battery was now in a much mutilated part of the old line, the wagon lines being in what once must have been a No Man's Land. The trees were mostly dead and battered old veterans, and countless graves of French soldiers, some named and others with merely the inscription "Ci git un unconnu" (here lies an unknown man).

That night and the following morning, August 31, heavy shelling was experienced around the battery position, the 25th Battery, only about 200 yards in front, sustaining a direct hit on one of their guns and having four men killed.

A great number of the shells that burst in rear and around the battery were H.E., with which was mixed an asphyxiating gas. The atmosphere for many hours contained a considerable quantity of gaseous fumes, although perhaps without being distinctly perceptible, especially while the detachments were firing the barrage. Later, owing to the wind changing, clouds of smoke and fumes from the bursting shells blew directly across the line of guns, and through not recognising immediately that gas was mixed with the smoke of the bursting charge, many did not use their respirators until too late, with the consequence that in all twenty-five N.C.O.'s and men had to be evacuated to hospital.

Sergt. F. Bradley	Gunner J. C. Eddy
Sergt. C. A. Cobbett	Gunner A. J. D. Frost
Sergt. W. D. Howard	Gunner J. A. Hay
Sergt. A. D. Waters	Gunner T. J. N. Loftus
Ftr. Sergt. H. Ridgwell	Gunner R. C. Morris
Bdr. R. G. Brooks	Gunner N. McLean
Bdr. I. C. Charlesworth	Gunner N. McLeod
Bdr. F. J. Cookesley	Gunner C. H. W. Owen
Gunner A. J. Brown	Gunner F. L. Pederson
Gunner G. A. Bartlett	Gunner F. S. Selwood
Gunner B. Davies	Gunner F. Taylor
Gunner J. G. Doig	Gunner B. H. Woolley.
Gunner R. P. S. Dawson	

The stunt at daybreak that morning was a success, the 38th Battalion being amongst those who took part in the hop over, and a great number of prisoners were marched back.

At eleven o'clock in the morning the enemy counter-attacked, and shell-fire everywhere was heavy all that day and the following night.

On Sunday morning, September 1, the barrage opened at 5 a.m., the battery's share amounting to 1,200 rounds. News was received that day that an entry had been made into Péronne, and in advancing about 4,000 yards the infantry had taken about 3,000 prisoners. A fair number of whizz-bang batteries had also been accounted for, and altogether the news put fresh heart into everyone.

At 7.30 a.m. the teams and wagons arrived to take the guns forward to their next position (H.6b 1280) to the left front of the village of Cléry. Alongside the battery were a 6-in. howitzer battery, and later on 60-pounders joined the party.

The following morning, September 2, the usual barrage opened at 5 a.m., and the battery fired 900 rounds. After firing in the barrage the battery's S.O.S. range was approximately 4,000 yards.

During the day many battalions of the 74th English Division passed along the road in rear of the guns. They had not long been on the Western Front, having only recently come from Palestine.

Until September 4 the battery remained in reserve, and although shells burst frequently in front and rear of the guns, and especially in the gully below, for the most part the remaining hours spent at this position were quiet ones.

On September 4 orders came through for the guns to be pulled out to wagon lines, thence moving back to wagon lines previously occupied west of Suzanne—in Shell Shock Gully—with the probability of a seven-days' spell and rest, which was badly needed, having been fifteen days continuously in action, so much having taken place in this interval, however, that to most the previous spell at Fouilloy seemed more as if it was fifteen weeks ago rather than only fifteen days.

## THE SPELL AT SUZANNE AND CLERY.

*From September 9, 1918, to September 28, 1918.*

The hoped-for rest turned out to be a very doubtful quantity as during the first morning at Suzanne rumours were prevalent that an order to return to the line might come through and would necessitate a move at a moment's notice. However, this did not come to pass on the first day, which in many ways spoilt the realisation of the spell, everyone expecting something untoward to happen. That evening, to cheer things up more than ever, a tropical downpour of rain lasting an hour turned the roads on the hillside into rapids and the vicinity of the horse-lines into a lake. The horses on their picket line were up to their knees in water, and all hands had to turn to and move them to fresh quarters on higher ground. Many of the men's shacks were washed away, and although the whole business was treated as a great joke, many a man had wet blankets and a wet bed that night.

The next morning, September 6, 1918, orders were received for a move off at 9 a.m., and the road via Suzanne, Cirlu and Hem was followed to wagon lines situated on the opposite side of the road to Howitzer Wood, where the guns had previously been in action. This day there was a terrible shortage of cigarettes and matches, very few having anything to smoke, or if they were so fortunate, nothing to get a light with. Although another move forward was expected that night, everyone settled down in old dugouts in one of Fritz's old trenches. However, the next day and night found the battery still there.

On the road everything pointed to another big attack being imminent, as troop buses in an endless column were slowly making their way along the road leading from Maricourt, and were discharging their loads at the road junction, returning by the lower road through Hem as soon as they were empty. The troops then marched on in the direction of the line.

Early one morning one of our observing planes was noticed flying at a low altitude in the vicinity, and from a closer scrutiny it was noticed that one of the plane's landing wheels was missing, evidently having been shot away while over the enemy's lines. Probably the pilot knew nothing of this and would be quite in ignorance until the time came for him to make his landing, when an accident seemed to be almost unavoidable.

On September 8, via Cléry, Péronne and Doingt, the battery as a whole moved forward to Courcelles, wagon lines being established at the latter village, where they remained resting until the night of September 17. During this time one or two football matches were played against other batteries. On the night of September 13, two Fritz aeroplanes, while engaged on bombing in the vicinity of Courcelles, were caught in the flood of light from one of the many searchlights, with the result that one of them was brought down.

On September 14, the first "Anzacs" left the battery on their return to Australia, and on this day Sergeant W. Martin and Driver A. K. Kirk left on their way home.

On September 15, while carting ammunition to the position which was to be occupied later by the guns in the next stunt, and which was now in course of preparation, Driver J. A. Giles was slightly wounded but remained on duty. Two days later the guns were pulled into position by the teams without any mishap. Their position actually was to the left rear of the village of Herville—immediately south of Roisel. It was a miserable time and likely to be vividly remembered by the gunners at the position, rain being almost continuous, and, in addition, a heavy barrage was put down by the enemy, and shelling with H.E. and gas was carried on throughout the night. As the position was not occupied until after dark, practically no arrangements could be made to provide shelter during the night from rain and shells, many of the gunners having to make the best of a scratch in the ground and a waterproof sheet. However, once again they were fortunate and suffered no casualties.

The barrage opened at 5.20 a.m. on the morning of September 18, 1918, covering an attack carried out by the 1st and 4th Divisions, and for this stunt the 3rd Division Artillery were attached to the 1st Division Artillery H.Q. The usual counter-attack followed and was successfully repulsed.

Réveillé at the wagon lines that morning was at 2 a.m., and two hours later they moved forward from Courcelles via Tincourt, Marquaix to Hamelet, a village just west of Herville. About 7 o'clock on the morning of the stunt—September 18—the guns moved forward to the rear of Hesbecourt.

After firing a few rounds in continuing the barrage which had commenced at the position in rear, nothing of any importance occurred. At 5.40 a.m. zero hour, on September 21, a creeping barrage was put down, the 27th Battery being superimposed over the 25th and 26th Batteries. The barrage lasted 63 minutes and was comprised of four lifts, about 380 rounds being fired by the battery during the firing.

Great secrecy was always observed in the arranging of all these attacks, the actual hour of the opening of the barrage being frequently withheld until within an hour or so of its opening. On

this occasion the code for notifying by telephone was in the following terms:—"Canteen Committee meet at 5.40 p.m., 21st Sept./18." In this instance the "p.m." was to be read as "a.m." Precautions also had to be taken with regard to telephones, as owing to the "Hindenburg Line" being not so far distant and being organised for defence, it was most probable that listening sets were installed. The S.O.S. signal on the Army front for this stunt was a rifle grenade signal showing three vertical red lights. On this occasion the 1st Division Infantry were the attackers together with the 74th English Division, the latter Division's right objective being Quinnemont Farm.

After this stunt the battery did little firing, and on September 24 the guns were pulled out, and after spending one night at the wagon lines the battery moved about 7 p.m. the next day to Boucly, in the vicinity of Tincourt, where they remained out of action until September 28.

## THE HINDENBURG LINE.

*From September 28, 1918, to October 6, 1918.*

At 7 p.m. on September 28 the battery moved off once again, and marching via Tincourt, which the enemy had been shelling that day with high velocity shells, but very thoughtfully had discontinued while the 7th Brigade went through, the battery followed the road to Hamel, Marquaix and Roisel. Outside Roisel, after crossing the railway line, the column made its way up the hill, and then striking out to the right into open country it made its way in the darkness, and after what seemed an interminable distance, reached the destination for the night. Many halts en route were necessary as traffic everywhere was heavy, and one of these stoppages was enlivened by a little excitement in the way of one of the usual nightly bombing raids, and on this occasion the enemy planes were immediately overhead.

About midnight the destination, which proved to be a small wood, was reached and the horses were picketed, and the men rolled themselves in their blankets getting what sleep they could, as bombs and shells during the night were much in evidence. By the morning it was found only one horse had suffered, although splinters had been singing overhead, striking the trees, or burying themselves in the undergrowth where the men and horses were congregated.

By the light of the morning it was possible to discern the whereabouts of the position, which was in the open, hilly country between Templeux and Ronssoy.

At 6.30 a.m. the centre section guns and firing battery went forward with Mr. Symes, being detailed to work with the Battalion Commander of the 40th Battalion.

After having reported to the Battalion Commander, they eventually did not do any firing, as it seems that the contemplated advance of that morning had not proved to be the success that was hoped for. Consequently, the 3rd Division Infantry could not advance as far as was originally intended. They had a trying day under machine-gun fire and heavy shell fire, seven horses in all becoming casualties, one shell bursting alongside one of the teams and one of the off horses being blown up by the explosion. Aeroplanes also, flying very low, used their machine guns on the teams and did further damage.

In the meantime the remainder of the battery proceeded forward at 8 a.m. from their bivouac of the previous night to the crest of the ridge behind Ronssoy, and were standing to awaiting orders to pull into action. During the day wild scenes were enacted on the road leading from Ronssoy to Templeux. Evidently being under observation from the Hun line, enemy batteries were disorganising the traffic, and some exciting episodes occurred.

At 4.30 p.m. orders came through to stand down, and the guns moved back about a mile. While looking for likely shelter for the night, further orders were received to proceed straight into action. An advance party, therefore, went forward with Mr. Slade, the battery following by way of Ronssoy to a position near Orchard Post. On the position being located and lines of fire laid out on a magnetic bearing of 47 deg. 40 min. the guns were brought into action. While waiting in a gully in rear of the position for the guide to take them to the spot the guns were to occupy, a barrage was put down by enemy batteries a few hundred yards in front of the waiting teams, and covering the actual position the guns were eventually to occupy. This necessitated the teams withdrawing to avoid unnecessary casualties, and just before dark they succeeded in occupying the position allotted to them and were there joined by the centre section.

The night turned out to be one of incessant rain, and in the hastily prepared dug-outs many of the gunners awoke in the early hours of the morning to find they had been sleeping in pools of water. Some gas shells burst in the vicinity, but otherwise the night was a quiet one. The range on the guns at the time was about 5,900 yards, the village of Bony being slightly to the left of the battery's sector and one of the chief causes of the American troops being held up.

Between Bellicourt and Bony, at the point of greatest strength of the whole Hindenburg Line, the blow was struck at this time, and the German troops holding this most vital point were made to recoil, although every German division available was rushed in in order to stop the gap. The 121st, 54th and 135th Divisions and the 75th Reserve Division were in the Hindenburg Line opposite the American Divisions which were in the attack on September 29. The fighting which ensued shattered and disorganised them to such an extent that the Germans rushed up three divisions immediately into the line at the same point.

Aussie Infantry on September 30, with a certain number of Americans, were attacking up the Hindenburg Line towards Bony, and the village was captured shortly afterwards.

The same day news of Douai and Menin falling into Allied hands was received, and with the much advertised Hindenburg Line now almost a fear of the past, it certainly struck many that this was the beginning of the end. The Germans well knew their famous line of defence was lost as from now onwards—on September 30—German troops and transport were reported as withdrawing along the roads leading east from the great defence, and some guns were seen later moving back.

The second system of the line, towards Le Catelet and before Nauroy, was shortly afterwards in our possession, and on October 1, from the Brigade O.P., the infantry could be seen attacking beyond Nauroy, over open rolling country, which was good to look upon after the brown and shell-torn appearance of the countless trenches to the west. A 4.5-in. howitzer battery of the R.F.A., using the same O.P., "blew out" a whizz-bang battery to the left

of Bony and on the opposite side of the canal, and evidently put the "wind up" the Fritz gunners to such an extent, that, after hoisting a white flag, they marched into our lines.

Under a barrage, in which the 27th Battery did not take any part, and with the assistance of tanks, the infantry worked their way through Estrées and brought the line to a position facing the third and last line of the Hindenburg system, which ran from Beaurevoir to Wiencourt and Ramicourt.

Although the southern entrance to the tunnel on the St. Quentin Canal was now in our possession, the northern entrance had not yet been taken. From St. Quentin the canal passed for the most part through level country, but from Bellenglis to Bellicourt it was in a cutting 100 feet or more deep. At Bellicourt it entered a tunnel similar to a railway tunnel, not emerging until near Le Catelet, a sunken road on the surface following its course the whole distance, with ventilator holes at intervals. At the Bellicourt end was situated the so-called "cook-house," but whether evidence has since proved it other than such cannot be stated.

On October 3, the battery fired a barrage at 5.50 a.m., moving forward by sections at 8.30 a.m. to a new position about 200 yards to the right of Quennemont Farm and just to the left of Malakoff Wood. The intervening ground, leading from the previous position, was covered with dead and the roadside presented an awful spectacle, as on both sides bodies were piled high, the greater number by far being those of Americans.

Quennemont Farm had recently sheltered a 5.9-in., but, although the gun was missing, a team of dead horses and a quantity of ammunition with a wagon badly smashed still remained to prove the accuracy of the artillery's fire.

The battery's zero line at this position was 50 deg. 40 min. magnetic bearing.

The guns were again in the open, the men's bivvies being erected in the shelter of a deep trench, previously in the outpost line of the main Hindenburg Line. There were many tunnels, well timbered, leading out of this trench, and some of them were used by the detachments of the battery.

Malakoff Wood itself had given cover to many machine guns, and from their positions in this wood they had observation almost as far back as Hargicourt, and could sweep the intervening gully with their fire. Above the wood, and connecting the forward outpost trench, was Peter Trench, which was the communicating trench with the main system on the crest of the ridge. This wood had been subjected to heavy shelling and the trench to enfilade fire by batteries of the brigade when in position in front of Herilly, and it was now interesting to see the effects of the fire of the guns.

Immediately in front of the guns a wild waste of gently rising ground stretched for about 400 yards and culminated in the main trench system which had been constructed on top of the ridge, and spread in an intricate fashion down the steeper slope on the eastern

side. In front of the main trench at the top four deep belts of barbed wire protected it and gave it an impregnable appearance. Built into this trench were concrete dugouts, with tunnels leading down to a considerable depth, but to many the first impression was one of disappointment that the much-vaunted Hindenburg Line was not of greater strength than appeared to a casual observer within a short time after its capture. Of concrete dugouts there were not such a great number, and, in comparison with trenches in the neighbourhood of Messines Ridge, they were less in number. The observation obtainable from this ridge was wonderful in either direction, both east and west, and now that the main ridge was no longer in the possession of the enemy, the tables were turned and all was in favour of the Allies.

The probable solution to the poor appearance of this celebrated defence system at this time was that in the early months of 1918 the line probably bore a different aspect when occupied by the Hun as a front line position.

On March 21, the opening day of the great offensive, the scene on this ridge can be imagined, all the lower valley being hidden by the fog, and the blue-grey figures advancing in the mist under the cover of their deadly barrage. Some fell before their own wire, as graves bearing the date of March 21 showed, but the greater number were down and among the defending artillery at the back of the valley before anything definite was known as to what had happened. Days followed of success upon success for the Hun hordes, and the Hindenburg Line was left far behind until it became even a line behind the "back areas."

Feeling "cock-sure" of his success and that the Allies had scarcely a "punch" left, the Huns were rudely awakened on August 8, and were kicked back day after day—the first few days being the biggest surprise they had ever received—until, before they scarcely realised it, they found themselves back on their famous Hindenburg Line, which the previous weeks of feverish work to repair and complete its defences had proved futile.

Authorities state that it was the enemy's plan to voluntarily retire from their March and April gains at the beginning of the winter, 1918, and at a time when an Allied offensive would be impossible owing to the weather conditions, at any rate until the spring of 1919, and by that time the enemy would have had ample time at his disposal during the winter months to make his Hindenburg Line a well-nigh impregnable defence, and at which the Allies would at least be forced to pay heavily for any little gain they might achieve when the Allied offensive opened as soon as the weather permitted in 1919.

After being on S.O.S. lines only, covering the 25th English Division, and having fired on occasions in answer to S.O.S. calls, the guns pulled out during the afternoon of October 5 to wagon lines at Villaret.

The weather at this time was cold and miserable, and everybody seemed to be suffering from the same complaint—they were all hungry—and a hard biscuit with a little cold dripping while

waiting for the next meal was regarded as a luxury, but unfortunately biscuits were not in an unlimited number.

During the day many troops were transported to Ronssoy by motor lorries on their way to the line. By this time Gouy, Le Catelet and other points on the canal at the northern end had been taken, and the advance had been going forward apace. The great difficulty at this time was the watering of horses, there being such a great shortage in this district, and sometimes it was necessary to travel distances up to five kilometres to get water, and back again.

On Sunday, October 6, the time was put back an hour, and shortly before 2 p.m. orders were issued to "stand to," packed and ready to move off, but the move did not actually take place until dusk, the wagon lines remaining in the same place.

During the day the Battery Commanders of the Brigade had reconnoitred the position, and the horse-holders, while waiting for their return, were shelled, Captain Moriarty's horse being wounded and others killed, and some of the horse-holders belonging to other batteries being wounded at the same time.

The road taken was across country to Bellicourt, and then by way of Nauroy through Estrées and by a branch road, which, judging by the Verey lights, was close to the line, to a gully position in front of Wiencourt.

The 27th Battery teams got home safely, but the 107th, on their way through Estrées, lost eight men and seven horses wounded.

## MONTBREHAIN.

*From October 6, 1918, to October 12, 1918.*

This position (B.29.C.55.21) was alongside a track which led from the Estrées Road to Montbrehain. The guns were about 50 yards from the track, on a raised bank which dropped abruptly to the road level in rear of them. In this bank Yank infantry had dug their shelters.

Most of the men were surprised to learn that in front of this infantry line there were no other defences than the Yank patrols, the distance to the enemy's position at the nearest point being approximately 800 yards.

It appeared that the next stunt was due the following morning at daybreak, but for some reason unknown it was postponed for 24 hours.

The following day—October 7—the battery, therefore, remained silent. About daylight most of the occupants of bivvies, which had been hurriedly dug in the bank the previous night, after vacant plots had been obtained—the Yanks having secured all the best sites before the battery's arrival—were rather disturbed and perturbed at what they saw. Looking outside, they found the infantry "standing to" with rifles pointing over the bank, and heard the cheering news that an attack by the Huns was in progress on the right, and they were now waiting for his appearance over the crest immediately in front! The barrage could be heard on the right, and much activity in the way of enemy shelling was carried out on the roads on all sides. However, the attack did not eventuate on the battery's front, and at dusk that evening the Yanks moved forward to take up their positions in readiness for the attack next morning. The 117th and 118th Regiments of the 30th American Division were to be the attackers.

Shells of all calibres, down to pine-apples, and light trench-mortars and H.E. gas shells were in profusion in the vicinity of the position during the night, and the village of Wiencourt in rear was shelled heavily. About daybreak enemy planes were over bombing the whole length of the valley, and one of the 18-pounder batteries on the left rear of the 27th had their No. 2 gun blown up by a direct hit from a bomb, three men of the detachment being killed and two other detachments being put out of action.

The barrage opened at 5.20 a.m., and the range lifted from 1,900 to 5,000 yards, lasting 2 hours 54 minutes.

Premont, Montbrehain, Brancourt and many other villages were taken this day, and by the number of enemy dead, mostly

killed by shrapnel fired in the barrage, the outstanding feature of this stunt seemed to be the heavy losses inflicted on the enemy.

A strongly-held machine-gun post, at the entrance to the village of Montbrehain, alone held 10 dead Germans, and everywhere casualties had been very heavy. Every possible cover had been taken advantage of, and now light trench mortars and whizz-bang batteries, and those which had caused much of the discomfiture of the nights preceding the barrage, were in our hands.

Every point had been strongly held, and each one now contained the bodies of German dead.

In front, and slightly to the left of the line of the batteries' guns, a tank was stationary and deserted, having been put out of action early in the piece. On finding it impossible to proceed it seems evident the officer and crew made for the shelter of the railway cutting, where the dead body of the officer and one of the crew were lying, evidently having been shot by a machine-gun stationed at the other end of the railway cutting where the line crosses the Montbrehain-Geneva Road.

Just before the barrage opened, a shell, bursting just above the bank, wounded two of the men of the battery—Gunner F. S. Barnes, who was on S.O.S. guard at the time, and Gunner M. Linnane. They both were evacuated to hospital, it being the fourth occasion on which Gunner Linnane's name appeared in the casualty lists.

Mr. McKellar that morning went forward with a signaller with the intention of picking up targets for the battery, but, mainly owing to the rapidity of the advance, none presented themselves for 18-pounders, a Divisional Observation Company, working in conjunction with the 60-pounders, having the advantage of the longer range.

"E" Sub.'s gun detachment that morning had a very narrow escape while firing in the barrage, a gas shell bursting within feet of the trail, but did no more than cover them with dirt from the explosion.

This was a great day for "souvenirs," and, among other things, complete telephone apparatus and signal-lamps were salved from enemy dugouts. Watches were also in evidence, and one yarn went the round, getting considerably exaggerated in the telling, of how a certain enthusiast explained his late arrival for the mid-day stew to the hard-hearted cooks, who refused to serve him, and so tried to gain a sympathetic ear. He explained how his valuable time had been spent in sitting for about half an hour, just waiting for a Hun to die, as his watch was far too good to leave in his pocket, and he hadn't the heart to take it off him while he lasted—for fear of hurting his feelings! With that explanation he probably got his stew, for he certainly deserved it!

A rather pathetic sight near the entrance to the village of Montbrehain was the body of a 2nd Division Pioneer, and on his

gas mask which was hanging round his shoulders was the inscription "I need thee every hour," and at the time of writing it he probably never thought of the picture he would present to passers by so soon afterwards.

A curious fact concerning the Americans which must have struck many who saw them was the great number of their men who died in such a position that their arms remained out-stretched. Even when lying on their backs very frequently one or both arms would be held almost straight out, and the fact seems difficult to account for.

Propaganda dropped from balloons and planes over the enemy's lines seems to have played an important part in the war, and at this time it was possible to pick up pamphlets dropped by our balloons and compare them with those dropped for the edification of the British soldier.

A translation of one found near Montbrehain is appended, and has no comparison with the poor attempt made by the Hun to stop the "torrents of blood which have 'flown,'" as his carefully-prepared article put it! How his attempt miserably missed the mark and had almost a humorous touch about it will be seen by the reproduction of a pamphlet found also in the neighbourhood of Montbrehain which at the time added unusual interest, as at that time there was no "need to charge any more the Hindenburg Line." That had already been done satisfactorily.

## TRANSLATION OF A.P. 72. By BALLOON. TO THE GERMAN PEOPLE.

Germans! Your Ambassador, Prince Lichnowsky, has told you that your rulers willed and provoked this war. This is absolutely the truth.

Your minister, Von Kuhlmann, has also told you that you cannot hope to attain peace by victory over the Entente powers, which moreover is also the truth.

Germans! Consider well yourselves. Why do you spill your blood in all the corners of the earth? To accumulate wealth, for the spread of commerce, or for a happier existence at home?

Before the war Germany was counted among the richest of nations, now she stands a bankrupt before the assembled nations. Before the war your merchants worked in all parts of the world with gigantic success; now, in most lands they see themselves menaced with a boycott. Before the war you lived freely and happily among those at home; this, even under the presence of militarism, was possible. Now, in most families, the father or son is missing, or they lead a sorrowful, unnatural existence. The mother sees sorrow before her, the children perishing from want of more suitable nourishment.

The war was engineered in order that one man who already ruled a mighty State, might rule the whole world: in order that one class, which has oppressed you from early times, might extend its dominion over you, and fasten itself more firmly upon you. This man and this class—the Kaiser and his Prussian junkers—have openly spoken of you as “food for the guns,” and such only are you worth to them. Your love have they wasted, but their ambition is not yet satisfied. In vain will you have ploughed your land but for the benefit of the beggarly Staff Command. Repeatedly have they promised you, giving a definite date for England to be conquered by submarine warfare, and for her to be laid at your mercy with hunger as the weapon. To-day England stands in relation to nourishment better than any one European country, and each German seaman who puts to sea in a U boat goes to meet an early and miserable death.

In spite of the U boats one million Americans stand before you in the field, and millions more are on the way.

You have hoped to weaken England's opposition by air attacks—with airships and aeroplanes. Ask them now on the Rhine what they think of an air war!

Germans! How long yet will you be the tool and victim of a self-glorified ruler—who, in his last resting-place, is only a man like the rest of us—and of a privileged class? And, moreover, let it be made clear, never will the Allies conclude peace with the Kaiser and his Prussian hang-men servants.

Must Germany perish without a trial with its own strength to help itself?

The following article, entitled:—

### “PEACE IN SIGHT AT LAST”

is the stirring address to the British soldier:—

“Austria-Hungary has again issued an appeal to all beligerent nations to enter into negotiations of peace.

“Austria-Hungary’s Allies, too, have on several occasions declared their readiness for peace, and their point of view remains still unchanged. What are the French, English, and American Governments going to say to this? Up to the present the offers of the Central Powers have been rejected by them. Why? Didn’t the soldiers at the front want peace? Who then was against it?

“What torrents of blood have since flown! *Is that going to continue?* Or do you want to have this awful bloodshed stopped at last. It’s about time, one should think. Let your rulers know that you, too, want peace.

“Once the negotiations have started they are sure to lead to an end. Then you won’t need to charge any more the Hindenburg Line, where the Germans, stronger than before and ready for fresh fighting, are awaiting your attacks.

“Your fate rests in your hands. Do you want to return home for the winter, or are fresh streams of your blood to flow in the desperate struggle for the strong German positions?”

On the following day, October 9, several civilians, both old men and women and young children, passed the battery position on their long tramp to the rear. These old people, having spent the last four years with the Boche, were highly delighted to find themselves once more free, and, even after the tramp of about ten kilos. from some of the villages ahead, they were still all smiling in spite of the prospect of several more kilos. before they arrived where food was obtainable. They explained that as soon as the bombardment opened up they made for the cellars in their houses, and, contrary to the orders of the Huns to evacuate the villages further still in rear, they remained there until an opportunity presented itself to slip out and make away in the opposite direction to that which the Boche was taking.

As previously mentioned, the dugouts occupied by the men were simply scrapings cut into the bank, and from the top side little or nothing was visible to suggest that the bank was a human rabbit warren.

In the early hours of the morning a disaster to some of the “residents” was narrowly averted. A full-grown tank, presumably full of thoughts of the previous day’s happenings, and on its way home after a night out, slowly crawled down the slope in front of the guns, passed them and made a bee line for the bank in which most of the men of the battery were sleeping, with scarcely six inches separating one shack from the next.

Without a thought of a “look before it leapt”—as tanks are built for that sort of procedure—it quietly slipped over the bank,

toppled forward, and resumed its awkward course. Right alongside the track at the moment that the tank was plunging forward, a head appeared out of the top of one of the bivvies, the occupant (Gunner Robinson, better known as " Robbie") having been awakened by the noise of machinery just in time to see the side of the tank which appeared to tower above him, and for the second time he had reason to congratulate himself on his particular luck.

Almost as if the whole episode had been carefully rehearsed, the two dugouts alongside, over which the tank passed, were unoccupied at the time, the owners being on duty in the telephone dugout.

The next day, October 10—the battery getting further out of range of the fast-retreating enemy in the meantime, and it being now possible to roam about the countryside at will, the war, seemingly, being miles away, the guns were pulled out about 6 p.m. An hour or so later they reached Etricourt, a cluster of farm houses in rear of Joncourt and not far from the St. Quentin-Cambrai Road. The wagon lines had moved forward to this place the same day, and once again the battery was in reserve for 48 hours.

About this time Peace, and the probability of an early cessation of fighting, was the main topic of all conversations, and even the order of going on " Blighty" leave as a topic had to take a secondary place in view of the importance of the other subject. Every man was his own President Wilson, and the terms of Peace had already been satisfactorily settled. On October 12 a Fourth Army Order was promulgated on parade to the effect that " Peace talk was to cease forthwith" as, if indulged in, the successful prosecution of the war was liable to suffer. However, fortunately for many, King's Regulations cannot crime a man for his thoughts—and this harmless pastime was still left to them.

## BUSCIGNY AND DISTRICT.

*From October 13, 1918, to October 19, 1918.*

On Sunday, October 13, 1918, *réveillé* was at 4.30 a.m., and the teams had to be ready to move by 8.30 a.m.

However, a start was not made until 10.30 a.m., and then by way of the Cambrai Road. The old Sugar Refinery was passed, and on the other side of the hill the turning to the right was taken leading through Joncourt, Ramicourt, Montbrehain and Brancourt. Close to the aerodrome, and before reaching Prémont, the brigade pulled into a paddock about 1 o'clock for a short halt for tea and dry rations.

Near by, two wrecked aeroplanes were piled up where they had fallen. Alongside one machine, one of our R.E. 8 planes, the bodies of the two airmen were still lying alongside the road. Several deserted German batteries were passed on the road, these being now a common sight of everyday occurrence. Dead horses were also well in evidence, and from these it was frequently noticeable that a "steak" had been cut, probably by the hungry French civilians who had been left by the friendly Boches to shift for themselves. In Prémont itself the church had been mined, and the road at that point, being narrow, it had effectively blocked the road.

On the other side of the village of Prémont—the road leading through the wood and under the railway bridge between Bohain and Buscigny—the village of Bécquigny was eventually reached.

The last part of the journey from Prémont was over exceptionally bad roads, but the surrounding country on the whole was barely touched by shell fire, the greater proportion of the houses showing no trace whatever of any shell fire.

Wagon lines were established in a small paddock almost in the centre of the village, and some of the single mounts were stabled in a well-built shed previously occupied by the horses used in connection with the German Army Forestry Branch. The team horses were on lines between the trees, and some of the men preferred the dugouts in the paddock to billets in the houses, as it was learned the line was only 3,000 yards distant, and although everything was quiet at the time, Fritz was scarcely to be trusted to remain so for any length of time.

The war was certainly becoming an incongruous mixture, as civilians—men, women and children—were living in the village, and carrying on their daily household duties as if nothing out of the ordinary was taking place. The day of the battery's arrival was a Sunday, and it was learned the Boches had suddenly decided to leave the village on the previous Tuesday (October 8), the day of the last barrage the battery had taken part in. Since then

Fritz had shelled the village on frequent occasions, and that morning a driver had been killed, and a week previous a civilian had been killed by one of the bombs dropped by an Allied plane.

The same story was heard everywhere of how the Huns just took what they wished, and returned weekly in case anything they required had been overlooked. In the end, as the result of four years of requisitions, the houses had little left within them, even the people themselves having scarcely enough clothing to keep themselves warm in winter. Quite frequently the gentle Hun in need of a lodging would sleep in the only bed, and the rightful owner in that case would have to take to the floor.

For many months previously the saying of the German soldiers to the French inhabitants, whether by order or of their own opinion, had been continually that the war would be over in two or three months, but the time never altered. During the previous few weeks his favourite catch phrase had been, "Madame, nous sommes perdus" (we are lost), and this seems more likely to have been the real feeling amongst them generally.

During the night whizz-bangs and 4.2's burst in different parts of the village and on the railway lines adjacent to the horse lines, and one horse was wounded and died later. The next day was one of great activity in the air, being more like a spring day than mid-October.

About mid-day (October 14) the guns went forward to the position via Buscigny, which proved to be a fair-sized town with a great number of civilians still living there. The wagon lines followed on shortly afterwards through Buscigny, turning off to the left at the outskirts on the far side of the town and establishing wagon lines not far from the railway line.

Once again, and contrary to orders, Peace talk broke out in earnest. It all started over someone who had spoken to a Yank who had evidently arranged for an armistice to commence that night at midnight. Unfortunately it didn't come off, so it appeared Yanks weren't to be trusted any more than other spreaders of good news. Everybody seemed on pins and needles, and during the afternoon all the occupants of one bivvy rushed out and asked where the sound of cheering came from. "Cheering?" said a driver standing outside, "that wasn't a cheer, that was a D.A.C. donk braying!"

The new position which the guns had taken up that afternoon was one which was occupied by the 47th Battery of the Mobile Brigade of the 4th Australian Division, the 27th Battery taking their own guns in and relieving them.

The position was located about 600 yards from the village of Escaufourt and north of the village, and the place was usually referred to afterwards as the "Hedge Possey."

That night several bursts of fire, in conjunction with other batteries of the group, were fired--these being known as "Group

Crashes." During the night a considerable number of shells burst in the village in rear of the battery, and a number of civilians suffered.

The next day a gruesome sight was presented in one of the houses alongside the hilly road leading out of the village where the shell had exploded in the room, killing the occupants, consisting of two Frenchmen, a woman, and two Tommies, their bodies being half covered with the débris.

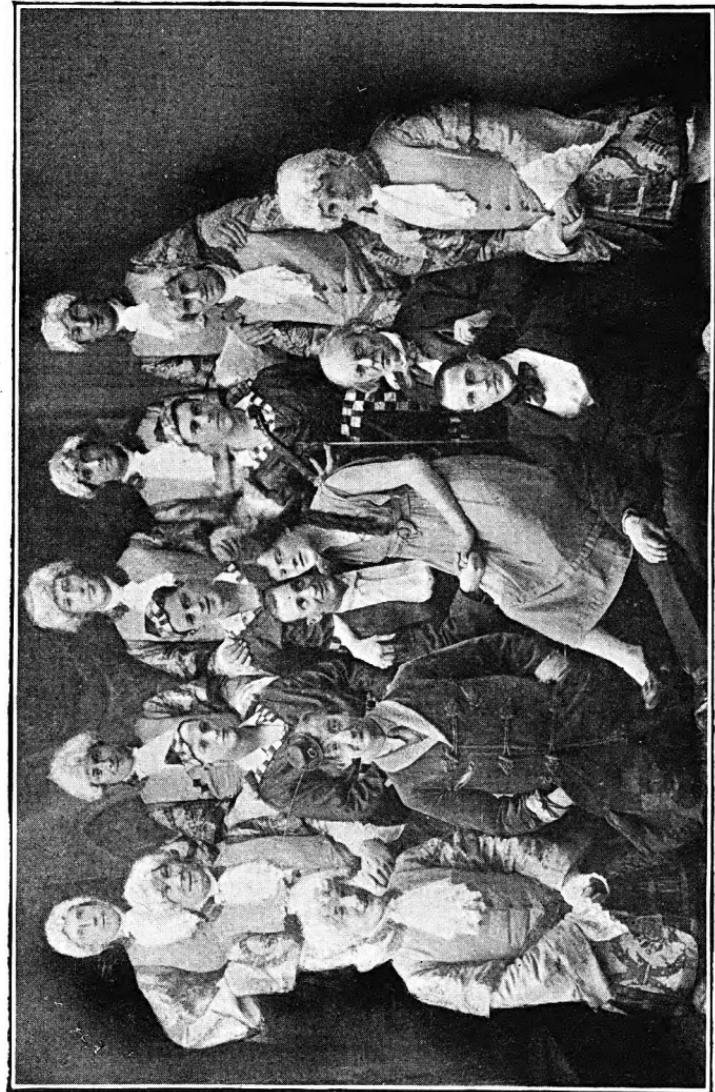
On the way up to the battery during the afternoon, Gunner J. Lumberg, one of the battery cooks, was wounded in the leg, and did not return to the battery from hospital.

On October 16 several gunners went forward about 700 yards to prepare gunpits for the position the guns were to occupy in firing the barrage the next morning; the guns going forward later in the day.

On the morning of the 17th the barrage opened at 5.20 a.m., the guns shooting in the direction of St. Souplet.

On the battery's sector the 120th Regiment of the 30th American Division, in conjunction with an English Division, made the attack. From the battery four signallers volunteered for duty with Mr. Slade—they were Gunners K. Andrews, T. H. Burrett, J. W. Craig and C. James. They reported to the headquarters of the 1st Battalion of the Yanks overnight, sleeping there until they moved up about 5 a.m., and in good time for the second barrage which was due to open at 11 o'clock in the morning. The point they made for was the railway cutting on the right front of St. Souplet. As after events showed, it was fortunate for the Americans the morning turned out to be a very foggy one. The enemy's front line was a distance of 500 yards from the Americans' line, and the Germans, anticipating the attack, withdrew about 2,000 yards to a position on a commanding ridge, leaving only machine gunners at intervals of about 100 yards to hold their old line. Owing to the fog they were unable to control their artillery or use their machine guns to the best effect. However, the Americans advanced about 1,800 yards under the early morning barrage, which proved anything but an effective one, owing to the difficulties the gunners had of seeing their aiming-post lights owing to the fog. The nature of the ground also was the cause of the trails becoming buried, which added to their difficulties. The casualties in the infantry on both sides were very light. Some of the batteries near by, however, sustained a number of casualties.

Before the barrage opened that morning, enemy batteries were very active around the battery, and Gunner T. H. Hayward has a lot to be thankful for. Rising about 3 a.m. that morning, thinking he was due for duty, he left his shack to make enquiries. Returning a few moments later, he found a shell had, in the meantime, burst right in the middle of his dugout—tearing his blanket to ribbons and destroying all his kit. His application having been approved a few days afterwards, Gunner Hayward



“THE COURTIERS.”

7th Brigade Concert Party, formed after the Armistice.

December, 1918.



proceeded to the Abbeville area to join the printing staff of the "Aussie." Many at the time thought it just as well he went away from the battery to greater safety, as a man with such a "tin hide" as his to escape being blown up one minute and the next to be the chosen man for a single vacancy in the back areas—where they only read of the war or write about it—it would only have been tempting Providence to stay in the danger zone!

During the day the gun teams were "standing to" in rear of the guns, as, had everything been as successful as was hoped for, the guns were to have gone forward for firing in the second barrage.

The same day a number of prisoners passed in rear of the wagon lines, and about midday following guns and wagon lines moved forward once again, taking up a position N.E. of La Haie Menneresse, the wagon lines being established in Proyart Wood, about 400 yards in rear.

Owing to a further enemy retirement, another move forward was necessary the following morning, October 19, and by way of La Haie Menneresse and St. Souplet, the place of rendezvous between the latter town and L'Arbre de Guise was reached about midday.

## ST. SOUPLET AND BAZUEL.

*From October 19, 1918, to October 26, 1918.*

Outside St. Souplet an American burying party were busily engaged on their painful duty of burying their comrades.

Shortly after passing the recently constructed bridge over the Sambre river, the original having been destroyed by the retreating enemy, a small mine exploded in a neighbouring house, evidently being set to burst hours after the Huns' departure.

The railway embankment and viaduct had also suffered badly, and a derelict engine still stood on the rails. In the deep cutting through which the road led on the other side of the railway bridge, the number of German and American dead pointed to a stiff resistance and severe casualties.

After the Battery Commanders of the Brigade had reconnoitred the ground ahead, and positions had been chosen, the guns pulled in, taking the road through the village of L'Arbre de Guise, and turning to the left in that village along the Le Cateau road. About 300 yards down, the guns turned into the paddocks on the right of the road, the zero line being 60 deg. magnetic bearing.

The ground in which dugouts had to be made was soaked with rain and very muddy, and the only covering available was that afforded by waterproof sheets, and to make the conditions more unpleasant that night was one of almost constant shelling.

In the meantime the rear wagon lines had remained in Proyart Wood, forward limber lines being established in St. Souplet near the railway embankment, and billets were taken up in the empty houses near by.

An old German machine-gun post, commanding the road and entire valley, was well concealed on the side of the embankment. A dead gunner lying near the gun and a shell hole just behind it proved that he had been caught in the opening barrage, the full belt of ammunition showing that he had not fired a shot, the timely shell frustrating his intentions.

The railway embankment on the outskirts of St. Souplet, where the limber lines were situated, was at this point the boundary between the departments of the Aisne and Nord.

The civilians, for about eight days previously, had endured many hardships while the battle progressed through their town.

In one cellar as many as forty old men and women had been congregated for days, with little food and water, at the end of the time their feet being swollen with the cold and damp.

The next day, October 21, the guns were moved forward in a north-westerly direction, taking up a position about a quarter of a mile in rear of Bazuel, and only about twice that distance from the Hun line. Vickers machine guns had emplacements one hundred yards in front of the guns, but to the left of their line of fire, which was to the south of Bazuel and enfiladed the enemy's lines further south, the range being about 3,000 yards.

The same day the wagon lines moved to a paddock adjacent to St. Benin, by way of the road running alongside the river Sambre. On arriving at the new wagon lines 1,800 rounds had to be carted immediately to the position.

October 22 and 23 were spent by the drivers in preparation for the next attack, and many trips were made to the position with ammunition. Enemy shelling was heavy everywhere on the towns of St. Souplet and St. Benin, and the roads and cross-roads were marked targets. At the battery position the fire of enemy artillery was exceptionally fierce, being well directed and alarmingly close to the guns and bivvies.

Some of the older hands, who perhaps were not quite as bold as they used to be, felt anything but optimistic. One little party, pretending to sleep in their scrape in the ground, had little to say, but smoked cigarettes at a reckless rate. After relighting the candle for the fourth time, and putting something to catch the drips that were pouring through the holes in the Fritz waterproof that had just been punched by splinters from the last burst, one of them suggested—at the same time trying to keep his knees quiet—that it was probably only "counter preparation," and perhaps he wouldn't follow it up by "coming over" in the morning after all! The next burst seemed as if it really intended to come right inside and join the happy party, but at the last moment it changed its mind and contented itself with landing outside the entrance, and nearly wrecked the shack with the weight of the dirt and clods it threw upon it. One of their number was due for duty, and some time afterwards, on returning and finding the others still in the same position, his only remark was "recommended for the 15th time!"

However, no one was ever more pleased to hear the barrage open with a crash on that night of October 23, or, more correctly, at 2 a.m. on the morning of October 24.

The hour selected for the infantry's attack was made possible by a full moon and a cloudless sky, and fortunate it was that such was the case, as the enemy was making things unpleasantly hot by the severity of his artillery fire. As soon as the barrage opened, an hour always anxiously awaited by infantry and others alike, the enemy's artillery fire perceptibly slackened on areas other than

those over which the infantry would be advancing, until it finally died down and ceased. On this occasion the enemy was taken completely by surprise at this almost unprecedented moonlight advance, three or four hours in advance of the usual hour for an attack, and which had taken place for weeks past almost daily just before dawn.

The wagon lines during all this shelling were not as fortunate as those at the guns. On the morning of October 22, just at dawn, enemy bombing planes flew over the lines at a very low altitude, and also again about breakfast time. Just as the men were lining up at the cook house about five o'clock for tea, two or three shells (4.2's) burst in the neighbouring paddock, switching later to St. Benin itself.

At 10 p.m. that night, when nearly all the drivers and others were turned in between the blankets under their sub-section tarpaulin, eight rounds of 4.2's, at about ten seconds interval, burst in the paddock in which the horses and shacks were situated. One of the shells burst right alongside "B" Sub.'s tarpaulin, and Driver F. Terry was killed on the spot. Drivers H. Baldwin, V. N. Bayliss and H. A. Pettard were all seriously wounded. They were immediately taken to the dressing station, quite handy, but Drivers Bayliss and Pettard died shortly after admittance, and Driver Baldwin the following morning.

In addition, other occupants of the same tent were wounded, and these were: Drivers R. G. J. Scott, H. Fagan, and A. C. Burrell.

Driver A. G. Klaproth, who was in a shack near by, was also rather seriously injured, and none of the above-mentioned returned to the battery.

About this time a Fourth Army Order was read on parade:—

"Since the Australian Corps joined the 4th Army on the 8th April, 1918, they have passed through a period of hard and uniformly successful fighting of which all ranks have every right to feel proud,

"Now that it has been possible to give the Australian Corps a well-earned period of rest, I wish to express to them my gratitude for all they have done. I have watched with the greatest interest and admiration the various stages through which they have passed from the hard times of FLERS and POZIERES to their culminating victories at MONT ST. QUENTIN and the great Hindenburg System at BONY, BELLICOURT TUNNEL and MONTBRE-HAIN.

"During the summer of 1918 the safety of AMIENS has been principally due to their determination, tenacity and valour.

"The story of what they have accomplished as a fighting Army Corps, of the diligence, gallantry, and skill which they have exhibited, and of the scientific methods which they have so

thoroughly and so successfully applied, has gained for all Australians a place of honour amongst Nations, and amongst the English-speaking races in particular.

"It has been my privilege to lead the Australian Corps in the Fourth Army during the decisive battles since August 8th which bid fair to bring the War to a successful conclusion at no distant date.

"No one realises more than I do the very prominent part which they have played, for I have watched from day to day every detail of their fighting, and learned to value beyond measure the prowess and determination of all ranks.

"In once more congratulating the Corps on a series of successes unsurpassed in this great War, I feel that no mere words of mine can adequately express the renown that they have won for themselves and the position they have established for the Australian Nation, not only in France, but throughout the World.

"I wish every Officer, N.C.O. and man all possible good fortune in the future, and a speedy and safe return to their beloved Australia.

" (Signed) H. RAWLINSON, General,  
" H.Q. Fourth Army, Commanding Fourth Army.

14th October, 1918."

On the afternoon of October 23 the wagon lines moved about 400 yards down the riverside road, in the direction of St. Souplet. The stunt that morning was a complete success and the guns pulled out of action the following day, remaining at wagon lines until the morning of October 26.

Réveillé that morning was before daybreak, and the column moved out an hour or so later. While passing through St. Souplet an enemy battery dropped a shell within 200 yards of the rear of the column, but, fortunately, it did no damage. The road taken was by way of La Haie Meneresse, Bohain and Brancourt to Montbrehain, where billets had been arranged for in some of the deserted houses in the direction of the cemetery.

It was understood that the battery was to be out of action for ten or fourteen days. At the end of four days, however, preparations had to be made on October 31 for a move up to the line once again, and education schemes and recreation came to a sudden end.

## THE LAST LAP.

*From November 1, 1918, to November 6, 1918.*

On November 1 réveillé was at 4.30 a.m., and the battery returned to the line through Brancourt, Bohain, Regnicourt, Andigny les Fermes, afterwards turning to the left and down into the village of La Vallée Mulatre, where wagon lines were formed practically in the centre of the village.

The following day Battery Commanders proceeded to the positions and lines of fire were laid out, the 27th Battery's guns being in a hedge about 300 yards in rear of a big farmhouse and practically due north of Wassigny.

During the afternoon the D.A.C. carted ammunition to the position and the teams pulled the guns into position, and the battery wagons also made a trip, drawing the ammunition from the dump, which was in charge of Mr. J. J. Graham, on the Wassigny-Ribeauville Road. One N.C.O. and three gunners remained as a guard on the guns and ammunition.

On November 3 the position was manned, and although the vicinity was subjected to bursts of shelling, while some rounds were very close to the guns, no casualties were suffered.

At 4 a.m. on the morning of November 4 the last barrage in which the 27th Battery were to take part was put down. After lasting six hours the barrage was completed, the range finishing at 6,450 yards. The attacking infantry on this occasion were regiments of the first English Division, and among them were battalions of the Black Watch and Cameron Highlanders. Until about 10 a.m. that morning there was a heavy ground mist, and after the barrage shoot was completed a certain amount of firing was done during the day.

In front of the battery, between 3,000 and 4,000 yards distant, was the Sambre Canal, and this natural defence had to be crossed by the infantry in the initial stages of the advance. For this purpose special bridges had to be hastily constructed under heavy fire, and tanks also had to be taken across. The bridge building was carried out by the Engineers of the 1st English Division and also of the 1st Australian Division, and their success reflects great credit upon them, and it was afterwards said that their work was considered one of the greatest engineering feats of the whole war.

On November 5, the day the guns went back to wagon lines in La Vallée Mulatre, several rounds were fired during the morning. At about five o'clock in the afternoon the guns were pulled out of action, it being intended that the battery should complete the rest which had so suddenly been interrupted while at Montbrehain.

Owing to the course of later events this was the last position the battery was to occupy in action. After returning on November 6 to Montbrehain—a day's march in continuous rain and cold, so that most of the gunners and drivers were wet through and miserable on their arrival—the following days were spent in the usual routine and in the spare time in endeavouring to patch up the leaky billets, most of which had suffered from previous shell fire.

Rumours of peace and an armistice were rampant, but by most were scarcely credited. At night, Allied bombing planes in droves passed overhead, almost until daybreak, and on one or two occasions enemy planes visited the neighbourhood.

On the dismissal of the stable parade at mid-day on November 11, Major Doherty gave out that any men who wished to hear an order which had just been received could remain while it was read. Some, however, went to their billets to get their dixies, as dinner was almost ready. The others, when the circular had been read, giving the official announcement of the armistice, made the usual dash for the queue at the cook-house, as dinner by then was quite ready.

It seemed that dinner was of far more importance, and news such as that just received evidently needed days before it was realised.

## **EDUCATION, DEMOBILISATION, AND REPATRIATION.**

The next month, until December 12, was spent in Montbrehain. Education schemes were under way, a club-room, known as Splinter Hall, was at the disposal of the men, and football matches were arranged.

On December 12, 1918, a move out to the Maubeuge Area was ordered, and a three days' march via Mazinghien and Avesnes brought the batteries of the 7th and 8th Brigades to the town of Hautmont, where Christmas was spent.

On January 2, 1919, the Prince of Wales, holding the rank of Captain, inspected the 3rd Divisional Artillery and presented decorations. Sergeant C. L. Chappell received his D.C.M., and Corporal M. T. Bourke the Military Medal.



